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MEDITATIONS  
UPON  
THE LOVE OF GOD.



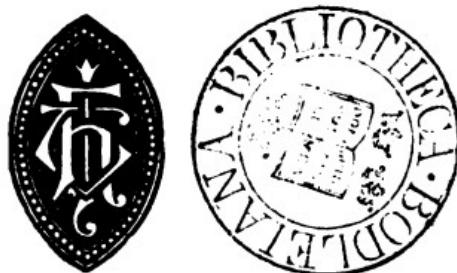
MEDITATIONS  
UPON  
THE LOVE OF GOD.

BY  
PÈRE GROU.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY  
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## INTRODUCTION.

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It has been thought that it would be useful to the Faithful to put before them a series of Meditations on the Love of GOD, and on the knowledge and love of JESUS CHRIST. "Life Eternal," says our LORD Himself, addressing the words to His FATHER, "is to know Thee the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST Whom Thou hast sent."\* All the Christian religion is comprised in these two objects. Knowledge leads to love, and love enforces the practice of those commandments, of which it is the first and the greatest.

These Meditations have been compiled in the form of Spiritual Retreat, for the convenience of those Christians who are in the

\* S. John xvii. 3.

habit of going into Retreat every year. But it is not necessary that those who use them should tie themselves to this method ; and that they should take, each day, one or several points of each Meditation wherein to occupy themselves before God—the attentive reading, will be sufficient for those persons who have not the facility for meditation. The object will be fulfilled, provided the mind and heart are penetrated by the truths that have been read and meditated upon, and that afterwards these truths are put into practice.

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# MEDITATIONS UPON THE LOVE OF GOD.

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## PRELIMINARY MEDITATION.

*"I have come to bring fire upon the earth ;  
and what will I, if it be already kindled?"—  
S. LUKE xii. 49.*

*First Point.*—What is this fire which JESUS CHRIST has come to bring upon the earth ? It is Divine Love. The Word was made flesh, He dwelt amongst us, He passed through the divers stages of His mortal life, He spoke, He acted, He suffered, only to teach us by His lessons, and by His example, to love God ; to obtain for us, to merit for us, to communicate to us,—Himself, the power to love God. This power is the greatest of all His benefits ; it embraces and enfolds all others. The true God was hardly known or loved before JESUS CHRIST came. He would not have been loved then, and He will be loved to the end of time, only through Him. He is the Sun of Love,

the True Light, that enlightens and enkindles supernaturally, every man born into the world. What part have I had up to this time in this great gift of JESUS CHRIST? If my soul is not filled by this sacred fire, is it to Him, is it not rather wholly to myself, that I must impute the blame? How much have I here to confound and to humiliate me! and at the same time what acts of reparation, oh my Saviour, have I to offer to Thee!

*Second Point.*—JESUS CHRIST desires nothing else but that this fire should be kindled in the heart of man. He wishes nothing else: as God, because His glory and our happiness, which are the two ends of His works belong to the love of God, and result from it as the effects of their cause; as man likewise He has no other desire, because it is the sole object of His mission, and it is perfectly fulfilled, if it succeeds in kindling in all hearts that fire with which the inhabitants of Heaven burn, and which they draw from the bosom of the Divinity. Heaven is essentially the region of this fire, which only descended to earth to ascend thither again, and to carry us there with it. But it must first consume in us all that is earthly; and it will never lift us to the realms of glory and of blessing, so long as there remains in our souls anything that it

has not purified. If JESUS CHRIST will not, and cannot wish for anything else than to encircle me with this Divine fire, should I desire aught else for myself? Am I not the enemy of God, if I put obstacles within me, to the means by which He wishes to assure His glory? Am I not the enemy of JESUS CHRIST, if I thwart the great design which called Him to the earth, if I oppose myself to His most ardent desire? Am I not my own enemy, if I do not open my heart to this sacred flame, the only source of my holiness and of my happiness? I must choose either to burn eternally in the fire of Divine love, or to burn eternally in the fire of hell. O LORD, can I waver between the fire of Thy love and that of Thine anger; between the fire wherewith Thou Thyselv burnest, and which constitutes Thy felicity, and the fire with which the demons burn, and which constitutes their despair, their rage, their irretrievable misery?

*Third Point.*—This fire which JESUS CHRIST came to bring, and which He desires to kindle, will not kindle in my heart, or at least will not abide and take root there, if I do not myself wish that it should kindle; if I do not try to entertain it, try to augment its ardour by my co-operation. I received the germ and the

first spark of it at my baptism. God placed it in me by His grace and mercy, but He ordered me to preserve it, and to give it sustenance for ever. Have I done it since I attained the age of reason, since I have known the value of love, and of sanctifying grace? How many a time have I extinguished in myself this Divine Love by mortal sin! I know that I extinguished it; I do not know if it has since been rekindled by the Sacrament of Penance; if it is so, it is but another benefit for which I am indebted to Thee, O my God. Am I not still very guilty in allowing it to be enfeebled by so much negligence and laxness; by an innumerable number of venial sins, the constant habit of indulging in which, exposes me to the danger of losing it altogether, perhaps without any hope that it will ever return? Have I not still to reproach myself with not having made use of, or of having made bad use, of so many means of sanctification, of so many internal and external mercies, of which the object was to increase in me the fire of love?

It is to bewail, before Thee, O my God, all my past faults, all my present luke-warmness and laxness; it is to make reparation for them, and with Thy grace to form holy and firm resolutions for the future; it is to learn and begin anew to

love Thee, that I am now going into Retreat. Divine Jesus, here is my heart; I give it up to Thee, and make Thee the Master of it. Prepare it to receive Thy Holy Love ; it is Thy desire, it is mine also. I neither ask of Thee sweetness nor consolation ; but I shall be content if I take away with me from these spiritual exercises a decided intention to consecrate to the love of God every accident and event of my life; to put into practice all the means, to profit by all the opportunities which may come in my way, to increase that love in me, and to have no other end for my thoughts, my desires, my actions, my sufferings.

So be it.

## FIRST DAY.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*On the Love of God for Himself.*

*First Point.*—God knows Himself from all eternity, and sees Himself as He is ; the I AM existing by Himself, and infinitely perfect. He cannot contemplate His perfections without loving Himself with a love as infinite as those perfections themselves ; and in this knowledge and this love He finds His supreme bliss, knowing that He is, and necessarily always must be, what He is ; that He will know Himself, that He will love Himself always, and that He will always be happy, sufficient for Himself, and having no need of any other joy. Remark the order : Knowledge, love, felicity. He loves Himself because He knows Himself, and because He can know nothing better, nor as good. He is happy because He loves Himself, and in possessing Himself He possesses the sovereign good. In God these three things, self-knowledge, self-love, being happy, do not follow, but accompany each other ; and they are but the same thing as

the very nature of God Himself, which is but knowledge of self, love of self, happiness in self. But according to our way of thinking, and in every other being but God, love presupposes knowledge, and happiness presupposes knowledge and love. Knowledge is the cause of love, and happiness is the effect of both.

*Second Point.*—God necessarily loves Himself, and properly speaking loves but Himself. Before He had created anything He loved only Himself, all His love terminated in Himself, and exhausted itself, as it were, upon Himself. The work of creation has changed nothing in this respect. He loves the creatures who are His work, but He does not love them in themselves, or for themselves : He loves Himself in them, and in their relation to Him. The love that He bears to Himself extends to all that His Hand produced, and specially to those intelligent beings whom He made in His image and likeness. Thus the love that God has for us is nothing else than that which He has for Himself ; and although this love is free in its outward effects, it is necessary in its principle. That is to say, God, for the same reason for which He loves Himself, cannot help loving me, so long as I do not render myself unworthy of His love, by myself ceasing to love Him ;

that because He is happy, He cannot wish not to make me happy, according to my capacity, and according to the measure of felicity to which it has pleased Him to destine me ; and that He will bestow upon me this felicity, provided that I fulfil the indispensable condition which He has attached to it, which is, to love Him. My happiness is but a reflection of His ; and it is impossible that I should be happy otherwise than by this reflection ; but it adds nothing to His happiness, just as my misery takes nothing from Him, if I make myself unhappy by my own fault. Therefore God finds in Himself the reason to love me, and to desire my happiness ; and this love is all gratuitous, all pure, and disinterested on His part ; because whether or not He had created me, whether I love Him or not, whether I be happy or miserable, He has not loved Himself, nor will not love Himself less for that reason ; He is not, and will not, be less happy thereby.

*Third Point.*—God is absolutely the only Being Who has the right to love Himself, because He knows Himself. Who can be happy by this knowledge and this love, and Who can love nothing except in connection with Himself, and with the same love with which He loves Himself. Every

one who knows his own heart, finds in it nothing but meanness, and meanness has nothing loveable about it ; he finds in his nature a longing capacity to avoid the command which is prescribed for him by the Creator ; and this longing is an imperfection well suited to humble him, and which he cannot love ; in his faculties he sees but barriers to his will ; sees but the impossibility of satisfying himself, or being sufficient for himself ; sees but desires which prove his indigence, and which he is not in a position to gratify. What can he love in all this ? That which he recognizes as good in himself comes from elsewhere ; it began with his life, and imposes upon him the obligation of loving the Author of his being, and of giving back to Him all that he holds from Him. If the creature, however perfect he supposes himself to be, sees in himself no reason to love himself for his own sake,—and if, on the contrary, he discovers only reasons for not loving himself, still less can he be happy in loving himself ; because this love, lacking foundation, will only deceive him, and procure for him a false happiness. Further, as it would be an extreme mistake so to love himself, it would but conspire to render him supremely miserable. Thus the creature having no right to love himself for himself, goes further and further from the command

when he loves something for himself, referring it to himself as its end. And if it be true that he cannot love any other creature in the same way, it would be a terrible reversing of the order of things, if he only loved God by the love he has for himself, looking upon himself as a centre where his affection for God would terminate.

This meditation is a little dry and abstract, but it is necessary, in order that we should understand what that love is which we owe to God.

The affections of the heart follow the enlightening of the mind ; and before we *love*, we must *know*. As God loves Himself necessarily for Himself, and all that is not Himself, only in connection with Himself, we should so love Him for Himself, and ourselves, and all the rest in connection with Him.

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#### SECOND MEDITATION.

*God created me that I might love Him for Himself.*

*First Point.*—All the works of God are an effusion of His goodness, and of His mercy. Creation is the fruit, all the others are the result of it; a Benefactor such as God is, Who owes nothing but

to Himself, Who did nothing, and could do nothing, except in His own sight, because beside Him nothing existed nor could exist, but by an act of His power, and His will ; such a Protector, I say, could have proposed to Himself no other end of His beneficence than that His infinite goodness should be admired and loved. That His numberless and inestimable benefits which were to conduce to our supreme and eternal felicity, should be to us a most powerful motive for loving God ; these things cannot be called in question, and God has especially willed that we should make this use of them. Our ingratitude would be extreme if they did not serve to this end. But has God willed, is it possible that He should will, that I should only love Him for His benefits, and that I should not soar to that which He is in Himself, to that which He deserves from me, of love for Himself ? I contend that this is absolutely impossible, and is as repugnant alike to the Benefactor, as to the quality of His gifts. If God is the principle and end of all, it must be that as all springs from Him, all must finally return to Him. If there is one thing of which He is jealous, it is of the love of His creatures ; and why should he be jealous of it if it were due exclusively to any other ; and why should it be due only to Him if He

were not the only Being to be loved for Himself alone ? What need had He of creatures ? None. Did He make them, because loving themselves, they should love Him afterwards, because of His benefits ? It would be absurd if the creature had commenced by loving itself, and that it only loved its Creator afterwards in consideration of the benefits which He has bestowed upon it, and those which He promises it. Does He only deserve their love under the title of a Benefactor ? Has He not another—incomparably more excellent, in His nature, and in His infinite perfections ? God has, therefore, ordained that His reasonable creatures should love Him before all for Himself, and that they should afterwards bring to bear upon that love motives of gratitude and hope, to make them love Him more. Thus the love engendered by gratitude and hope is not the love, properly so called, which I owe to God, and which He exacts from me ; and if the motive of His supreme loveableness is not the principal and the most powerful motive in my heart to make me determine to love Him, I do not recognize his benefits as I ought to do, and I make myself unworthy of His promises, and incapable of enjoying them.

*Second Point.—God has given me an understanding. To what end ? Is it to*

know myself? No, my understanding ought to rise higher, and by the knowledge of His creatures, and of myself, arrive at the knowledge of God, contemplate His perfections, and rest in the contemplation. My mind is not capable of the truth of comprehending the Infinite, God only knows Himself; but it is capable of knowing Him, it aspires thereto with all its efforts, and this desire burns so deeply within it, that no finite knowledge will fully satisfy its curiosity. Again, whatever science my mind is cultivating, on whatever object it fixes its thoughts, whether I reflect upon others or upon myself, all lifts me up to God, all leads me back to Him; He is the first link in the chain to which all truths hold, He is the last, in which they all end. I know nothing thoroughly, either in philosophy or in morals, if I do not know God; and I cannot reason as I should on anything if I ignore God as the first Cause, and the last End of all things. Is it not evident that God has endowed me with an understanding but to know Him? that the most noble use that I can make of it is to apply it to this object? But if I apply it to any other, without any relation to God, I abuse it contrary to its end. God has given me a will capable of loving. Without doubt it is that I may love what is loveable; but nothing

is truly, nothing is supremely, nothing is entirely loveable but Himself. That which His creatures possess of what is good and beautiful, from Whom do they hold it but from Him Who is supreme beauty and goodness? Has He made them that I might fix my love upon them? Has He given me the use of them that I might attach myself to them, and forget Him? Do they not all say to me in their own language: Do not stop at us, mount upwards to our common Author, it is to make Himself loved of Thee that He offers us to thy view, and permits thee to use us. The will, which is blind, can allow itself to be seduced by the senses, by imagination, by passion. But the understanding is destined to enlighten and direct its affections. Let it follow in its own pure light, it will but lead it to love God in Himself, and in all His created beings. God has endowed me with free will. Why? Is it to dispose of myself and all that He has placed in my keeping, according to my own taste? Has He wished to make me my own master, and authorized me to free myself from His dominion? This thought cannot seriously be in my mind. His design has been that loving Him freely and by choice, and giving Him the preference over every other object, this love should be glorious for Him, and should merit a reward from Him. His

first aim was His Glory, His second aim my happiness. Let me begin by glorifying Him, in loving Him freely for Himself; He will then make me happy by this very love, in assuring me of the incomparable blessing of seeing Him, loving Him, possessing Him for ever. But do not let me reverse the order, do not let me love Him exclusively because of the promised reward, for then I should not merit it, and I should be deprived of it irrevocably.

*Third Point.*—Let us dwell for a little on the desire for happiness, and see if it is opposed to the Love of God for Himself. I desire to be happy as a necessary consequence of that love which I have for myself; that is incontestable; but from whence does this desire come to me? Out of my poverty? If I were sufficient for myself I should not desire to be happy, I should be so. Where does it take me? Out of myself towards a Being more excellent than myself, towards an infinite Being, the only One capable of filling the immensity of my desires; in a word, towards God, looked upon as the Supreme Good. I know Him there, this Supreme Good, I love Him as such in Himself, and for Himself, before desiring to be united to Him, as to my Supreme Good. For how should I

desire it, if I did not know that He is infinitely perfect and loveable, and if I did not already love Him in relation to *Himself*, before loving Him in relation to *myself*? These are the reflections and the promptings of self-love which spoil everything here below, and which change the order of these relations. But self-love and well-regulated love of myself are two very different things. It is well-directed love that makes me desire my happiness, and that seeks it in God, as in the source of all perfection and of all felicity, and in the Being Who alone deserves to be loved for Himself, and Whom I love with a well-regulated love, and in a direct manner; Whom I love also by reflection, as my last end, and the principle of my happiness,—not in drawing Him into relation with me, which constitutes self-love, but in placing myself into relation with Him.

The sin of self-love consists in viewing nothing honestly, neither happiness nor even God Himself, except in relation to self. It consists in appropriating all to itself, inasmuch as its one end is its own welfare, and it only looks upon the possession of God, and of His love, as a means to this end. By this strange confusion, love of myself becomes my principal and ruling passion, and the love of God is but a secondary love. I desire my own happy-

ness, and I love myself above all else. Afterwards I love God, and I desire to possess Him as a means necessary to that happiness.

But it is possible that God, Who has planted in my nature the wish and the longing for happiness, and of a happiness that I can find but in Him, has intended thereby to release me from loving Him for Himself, and allowing me in some way to love Him only in relation to myself. This is absurd in the highest degree. What! God is infinitely loveable in Himself. He is as such the Supreme Good, the necessary principle and end of all the happiness of every intelligent creature; and because I cannot be happy but through Him, it is impossible for me to love Him for Himself, otherwise than with a view to possessing Him, which I desire only on my own account. If this were true, I should not scruple to say that God would never have created beings capable of happiness; because by so doing He would have injured His own glory, and He would have bound Himself to love Himself alone, without wishing to be loved by any creature in a manner so unworthy of Him. The wish for happiness would be vain in man, if he could not love, and if he were not obliged to love God for Himself, because he would not attain to happiness nor enjoy it by this love.

## THIRD MEDITATION.

*On the same Subject.*

*First Point.*—God is Love, says S. John, and the only source of all love. It is He Who puts into our hearts, by the Holy Spirit, the eternal love of the Father and of the Son. What other love can God put into me than that with which He loves Himself? There has been no other from all eternity; there never has been, and there never will be any other. This love is pure, infinitely pure in its origin; it is so in its habits; infused by Baptism into the soul of the Christian. It will always be so in its acts, if love of myself does not come in and soil it with its unhappy egotism. It is neither gratitude nor hope that adulterates its purity. These two virtues have their own motives, which agree very well with the real motive of love, and which would easily subsist with it, if self-love did not insinuate itself into these motives, and did not infect them more or less with its poison. I can love God for His benefits; I can love Him for the reward which He promises me, and which I confidently expect from Him; and, at the same time, I can love Him still more for Himself. What does it matter after all, if whilst I love God specially out of gratitude or of hope, I

• do not love Him out of the formal motive or reason of love ? Does this love exist any the less in my heart ? The other virtues which I put in their place beneath it, and that I exercise when grace inspires me to do so, do they weaken the habit of love ? What does God require ? That this habit should reign in me ; that I should more frequently show forth works resulting from it ; that never should the sight of His benefits, nor the hope of His promises, nor even the fear of His punishments, throw upon it the smallest stain, and that it should live for ever the mistress and the queen of my affections. And, after all this, not only does He not forbid that it should be so, but He even expressly wills that, in certain circumstances, the terror of His judgments should restrain me from evil, and confirm me in the practice of good ; that in other circumstances, the remembrance of His benefits should penetrate me with gratitude, and force me to give Him freely what He has given me, and all He asks of me ; that in other circumstances, the hope of the promised reward should help me to surmount all difficulties in the way of virtue ; should inspire me with a generous contempt for earthly things ; should sustain me in suffering and in affliction. Jesus Christ, the Apostles, all the Saints of the Old and the New Testament, present

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to us this example, we inculcate, we recommend it, we order it, to be made use of; and assuredly neither Jesus Christ, nor the Prophets, nor the Apostles, could have thought to prejudice by their example the least in the world the purity of love, or the obligation to preserve, and to fortify the habit within ourselves by frequent exercise.

*Second Point.*—How is it that God wishes, above all else, to be loved for Himself? We vile and miserable creatures, we desire to be thus loved, and we know no other true love but this which loves us for ourselves. What husband would not be shocked if he had reason to think that his wife did not love him for himself, but for reasons concerning her own interest? And the wife of course would feel the same. What father would set any store upon the affection and obedience of his children, if they were simply founded on his title of father, and only had their birth in natural instincts; that they only loved him for their own good, and for their present and future well-being? What master does not desire that his servants should be sincerely attached to him, and that they should not serve him faithfully only because they have in view the wages and other emoluments which they receive, or which they expect? What would friendship be but a simple traffic, if reciprocal

services and benefits were the principal motives and the only foundation of it? And the reason that it is said that the great ones of this earth seldom have any friends, is it not because people generally attach themselves to them from motives of interest or of ambition? What! men can be exacting to excess in love; and God, Who only has the right of being so, Who is necessarily jealous of our heart, Who can discern its most secret affections, can He be indifferent as to whether we love Him for His own sake, or for ours? Can it be that by His benefits and by His promises He has Himself weakened the great title by which He demands our love? What are our titles of father, husband, master, friend, in comparison with His? Is He not eminently all these in His relations to us? On this point does He not unite in Himself, and infinitely surpass, all that we have a right to expect? And again, has He not one title that we can never claim for ourselves: the absolute and infinite perfection of His nature, of which all that is loveable in us is but a vestige, a shadow, a feeble resemblance? God allows pure love between man and man up to a certain point; provided that it be, as it were, referred to Him. He exacts it between husband and wife, between parents and children, between those whom the ties

of blood unite; and will He not exact it for Himself? Will He content Himself with a love springing from some other motive? Nothing can make us better see the injustice and the blindness of self-love than this: that it dares to wish for itself what it refuses or denies to God.

*Third Point.*—Instead of refusing to God this pure love, which He alone deserves, all my glory and my joy should be thus to love Him. My true nobility consists in the capacity of knowing and loving God; and the perfect peace of my mind and of my heart is only to be found in this love. That which constitutes the happiness of God, ought to begin mine here on earth, and consummate it for ever in Heaven. How grand is my destiny! It unites me inseparably with God; and I require nothing less than this love to make me happy. What abasement, what degradation for me, if I profane my love by bestowing it on any other object, on anything less than God! God offers me happiness, and offers it me in the enjoyment of Himself; and shall I seek it elsewhere? He asks of me no other condition but to love Him, and shall I not fulfil it? He shows to me inevitable misery, irreparable loss, supreme unhappiness, the loss of the sovereign good, if I do

not love Him ; and shall I not be touched thereby ; shall not this view of the matter detach me from the creature, that I may attach myself to the Creator !

Still, I know that I deceive myself, and that in those objects which seduce me I am pursuing a happiness which is ever escaping me ; or, perhaps, to express it better, I imagine that I find in their enjoyment a felicity which I have never yet met with in them, because it neither exists, nor can ever exist in them. Reason, and experience which is still more persuasive than reason, convince me equally of this. Am I not, therefore, my own most mortal enemy ? And what evil ought I not to wish to this unhappy self-love, which deprives me of the supreme, the only good, which leaves me in my poverty, and renders to me but vain smoke, which one day will be taken from me by force, and will give me up to despair that all is lost without hope of recall !

The mistake into which I fall, in refusing to God the honour which is justly due to Him, is so great that it is not possible to measure it as it is. Nothing less than infinite intelligence is needed to comprehend it. By it I become a monstrous being, an object of horror, not only to God, but to every created being who is a friend to His order. However little I reflect upon it, I cannot avoid being frightened at

myself. So at my departure from this world ; if I die without having the love of God in my heart, I shall, of my own free will, precipitate myself into hell, as into the only place that suits me.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *On Acts of Love to God.*

The considerations of this retreat will revert to the means of entertaining and increasing the love of God within us ; on the use of it which we have made up to the present time, and on that which we ought to make of it from henceforth. Acts of love to God will be the first subject.

The gift of love is only infused into our hearts that we may exercise the acts thereof. Otherwise this habit would remain idle, against the express will of God, which would be a great evil ; and, moreover, we should expose ourselves to the loss of it. We know that we received this precious gift at our Baptism, but we have no assurance that we have preserved it, or recovered it by penitence. Although God relieves us from all anxiety on this subject, when our conscience does not reproach us in any way, because His aim in leaving us in this uncertainty is to establish in us the grace of humility, nevertheless, nothing is more consoling for us than to be able to give the

testimony of our love to God ; and one of the most certain tests that we have of it is when we frequently show forth acts of love. What a boon, what sweetness, what true peace, for the Christian to be able to say with S. Augustine, " My God, my conscience assures me that I love Thee." But in order to be able to say this we must feel that love is alive in our hearts, and we only know that it is alive by the acts which it produces. If these acts really proceed from the heart, it is a proof that love is dwelling there ; if they are frequent, it is a sign that it is full of health and vigour. If, on the contrary, these acts are rare, if they are only on the lips, and that they are not accompanied by feeling, it is a proof that love is cold and languishing ; we should have reason to think it was dead, if we spent any considerable time without rendering any act proceeding from it.

The Christian is obliged not only to keep, but to cultivate in himself the habit of the love of God. This cannot admit of any doubt, although we cannot precisely fix the limits of this obligation. Anyhow, it is certain that no habit whatever can be preserved except by action ; and the only rule by which we can judge that it is weakening, or that it is altogether extinguished, is when actions become rare, or when for a long time none at all have been produced. This relates to good habits, as well as to

bad ; to the supernatural, as well as to the natural. It is certain also that all habits only grow and strengthen in proportion to the frequency of actions. Thus it follows that the Christian is obliged often to offer acts of love to God. And as we cannot precisely estimate how many times by week, or month, or day, we should offer these acts, that which we must conclude is, that we must not be content with our own inclinations on that point, except when we have reason to think that God is so ; and this conclusion goes very much further than we think ; God never being satisfied with us, but when we love Him with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength.

But by what means can the Christian exercise these acts of love, as frequently as God wishes that he should ? In this way : the method is simple and easy, at the same time it is the only way ; there is absolutely no other. Let God Himself rule these acts, and not you ; inasmuch as you cannot show them forth without Him. Begin, then, by installing Him as absolute Master of your heart, and of all your actions. Then pray to Him every day : in the morning that He will cause you to perform during the day as many acts of love as shall please Him, for His own glory, and for your sanctification ; after that, keep yourself during the day sufficiently recol-

lected, sufficiently attentive to His inspirations, so that you may not miss one which He sends you. Make at least this one firm resolution, renew it each time you are tempted to stray from it, and offer for it an act of lively and sincere sorrow. You will not have made use of this method long, before you will have experienced its beneficial results. If you say in truth that this is a sure means, but that it does not appear easy to you, it is because you do not love, and that you will not love. Embrace it, and God will make it easy to you. Would it not be strange if you pretended to practise the love of God without its costing you any inconvenience, any effort, any trouble? Remember that your nature, corrupted by sin, repudiates the love of God with all its strength. Remember that you have increased this corruption, and strengthened this repugnance by your own personal faults. Remember, lastly, that the aim of the love of God is to destroy in you the work of sin, to raise you above nature, and to change the animal man into a man spiritual and divine. And you wish to experience no difficulty in the exercise of this love? The contradiction is a palpable one. When I said that the method that I proposed was an easy one, I meant that it was easy to good-will, but not to nature.

You wish to know the result of this method faithfully practised ? Firstly : God, seeing the strength of your purpose, will aid you powerfully : He will suggest to you frequent acts of love ; He will cause you to find in them so much pleasantness and sweetness, that you will be filled with an ardent desire to increase them more and more ; each day they will become more fervent and more natural to you ; they will change themselves into habits ; you will perform them without reflection, almost without knowing that you are performing them ; and, as S. Gregory of Nazianzen says, they will end in becoming to you as easy, as natural, as continuous, as the air you breathe. You wish that this should be. Begin, continue, and you will attain to it.

## SECOND DAY.

## ON THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*On these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."*

*First Point.*—Saint Augustine is rightly astonished that man should need a formal commandment in order to love God, as if this precept were not engendered in the depths of his nature. He is astonished that it should be necessary to frighten man with the vision of hell if he does not love God, as if *not* loving Him was not trouble enough, ay, the greatest of all troubles. These sentiments are worthy of that great Saint, so eminently distinguished for the love of God. But since the introduction of sin into the world, this commandment and its threatenings have become necessary to us; and it is this that ought to cause us deep humiliation, in thinking to what depths our nature is degraded. That which puts the finishing stroke to our humiliation is, that, in spite of such a commandment,

and of its terrible threatenings, we do not love, we have so much trouble to love, we love so feebly ; our heart attaches itself ardently to every other object but to God. Let us blush, let us be confounded thereat, and so let us enter upon the meditation of the words of the commandment. First, think of what JESUS CHRIST has said : that it is the first and the greatest of all commandments. It is the first, there can be none other before it, it is necessarily at the head of all the others. It is the greatest, because of the Majesty of its Object : it relates to God ; by the nobility of the sentiment which it commands, it speaks of Love ; by the extent of its matter, it comprehends all, and all refers to it ; by its end, which is the glory of God, and the happiness of the creature ; by the rigour of its obligation, which nothing whatever can set aside, at any time, in any place, under any circumstances ; by the sorrow which attends any infringement of it, for the misery of man begins the very instant he violates it.

*Thou shalt love.*—With what love ? With a love of preference to any other object, and to thyself ; thy affection for God will surpass if it can every other affection, inasmuch as He Himself surpasses every other being ; thou wilt be disposed, when occasion offers itself, to sacrifice all, even

• thy life itself, rather than offend Him ; thou wilt be fearful, above all things, not to displease Him ; and thou wilt look upon the most trifling sin as an infinite evil, greater than any other ill of any other kind ; thou wilt put the gain of pleasing Him above all other gain, of whatever value it may be ; and thou wilt be more jealous of His friendship than of that of the most distinguished and greatest of the earth. Not only His absolute rule, but His rule of love, will be thy law and guide ; thou wilt throw at thy feet all human respect ; thou wilt mistrust every promise, every threat ; thou wilt surmount every obstacle to follow it.

*Thou shalt love* with a love of satisfaction, contemplating with joy the infinite perfections of God ; admiring them, congratulating Him upon possessing them, esteeming thyself happy in belonging to so perfect a Being, of depending upon Him, and thou wilt be more vain of this dependence than if thou rejoiced in the rule of the universe.

*Thou shalt love* with a love of benevolence ; and, not being able to desire for God, with respect to His nature, any good which He does not eminently possess, thou wilt desire that His creatures should render Him all the glory which he exacts and expects of them ; thou wilt be zealous for His honour ; thou wilt procure it by all the

means in thy power, at least by thy vows and thy prayers ; thou wilt earnestly desire that all men should know Him, love Him, adore Him, obey Him ; thou wilt be touched to the heart at the sight of all the crimes which inundate the universe, and thy zeal will equal that of David.

*Thou shalt love with a real love, not limiting thyself to simple affections, which would deceive thee if they produced no fruit, but which would not deceive God ; and thou wilt be careful that thy actions respond to thy feelings.*

*Thou shalt love for ever, and without interruption, knowing that thy life is given thee but for this object, and that each moment that is not consecrated to love is lost for God and for thyself. Thou wilt force thyself to love more and more each day, directing all that happens to thee to this end : all that thou doest, all that thou sufferest, all the events which happen in the world, and which come to thy knowledge ; thou wilt regret not to have loved sooner, and thou wilt say with S. Augustine, "Beauty, so old and yet so new, I have begun to love Thee very late." Thou wilt reproach thyself for not loving enough, and thou wilt supply that which is wanting in thy love by uniting it to that of the blessed spirits and saints who are in Heaven, to that of all those who live upon the earth ; and,*

- above all, to that of JESUS CHRIST, *that thou claimest for thyself by the right He gives thee in it, and that thou offerest unto God as only worthy of Him.*

*Second Point.—Thou shalt love the Lord; the LORD above all, the only LORD, to Whom this name belongs in an incommunicable manner; that Name before which all other lords tremble and grovel in the dust, knowing that they are naught, that they hold from Him their power and their authority, and that they can only exist in His Name, according to His intentions, and for His glory. The Being Whom thou art commanded to love is the Supreme Being, the only great, the only perfect, the only existing Being by the necessity of His Nature, the only One infinitely lovable in Himself, and for Himself. Vile creature that thou art, fear, and respect, ought to keep thee all silent before Him. He wishes thee to love Him, to aspire to His confidence, to His most intimate familiarity; that love should make thee enter into the blessings of His immense riches, that thou shouldest share with Him His glory and His joy. He wishes this as ardently as if it were necessary to His happiness. He lowers Himself to thy level in asking of thee thy love, to raise thee up to Him, and to consummate and absorb thee in His unity. What in-*

effable condescension ! What incomparable grace ! Thy fear is not pleasing to Him if it does not lead thee to love ; He is not flattered by thy homage, if it is not dictated by love. He has warned thee ; and He does not ask thy love, but after having given thee incontrovertible proofs of His. Thou shalt therefore love the **LORD** for His infinite perfections. Thou wilt make this love the first and the most cherished of thy duties, thou wilt stake thy happiness on the fulfilment of them, and thou wilt think thyself overpaid for thy love, by thy love itself. Thou wilt be able to say with S. Bernard : “ I love because I love ; I love in order to love.”

*Third Point.—Thou shalt love the LORD thy God.*—What means thy God ? It means thy good ; thy supreme and only good. He made thee that thou mightest possess Him ; He gives Himself to thee ; He wishes nothing to belong to thee, as intimately, as surely, as inseparably as He does ; He is thine if thou lovest Him, and in proportion as thou lovest Him. Apply thy faith, thy hope, thy love to these words, so short, and yet so full of meaning : My God ; Thou art my God in the order of nature ; Thou hast created me, and made me what I am ; Thou preservest me every moment ; I hold from Thee all the benefits which I enjoy ;

I can expect but from Thee all for which I hope ; they are less the fruits of my talents, of my industry, of the goodwill of my neighbour towards me, than of Thy liberality and Thy providential care. But what is all this compared to Thee, Who art the Creator, the God of nature, only in order that Thou mayest be *my* God ? The world will pass away, and Thou wilt still be left to me ; and if Thou art left to me, I shall have no regret at its loss. I cannot say *my* world, but I can say *my* God ; and it is this that makes me infinitely richer than if the whole of nature were at my disposal. Thou art my God in a manner incomparably greater, that of grace. Thou placedst me first in the person of my first parents in a station much above my natural condition, in a position to which my desires and my hopes could not reach. After I was debarred from this high estate by sin, Thou establishedst me still more advantageously, by adopting me as Thy child, in the Person of Thine only Son. Thou gavedst me abundantly all those helps necessary to attain my end. Thou forgavedst me every time I came to Thee after having offended Thee ; and it was Thou Who didst invite me to return, Who made the first advances. What reasons have I not, for loving Him Who, having no need of me, thus loved me first ? And why did

He love me? That I might in my turn love Him, and that in the transports of my gratitude I should say to Him: "Thou art my God."

Thou wishest to be so for ever in the order of glory. Thou hast destined me to the eternal possession of Thyself, to share Thine own joy. By an effort of Thine Almighty power, by an inconceivable excess of Thy goodness, Thou wilt elevate my intelligence to the capacity that will make me see Thee face to face, and enable me to contemplate, without being dazzled, the splendour of Thine Infinite Majesty. Thou wilt expand my narrow and bounded heart, until it can receive and contain those grave and voluptuous torrents which flow from Thine essence. Then shall I say with certainty, and without fear that Thou shouldest ever be ravished by me: Thou art my God, my Treasure, my All. My soul, this is how He Who has loved thee from all eternity, and Who wishes to love thee during all eternity, commands thee to love Him during the short space of this life, in order to see Him, know Him, and possess Him for evermore. What a commandment is this, which has its source in the love of God for His creatures, which requires of them but to love God, and which assures them of this same love as their eternal reward. Wilt thou say that it is

supremely reasonable, infinitely sweet ? This is not enough. The law which it imposes on thee is to wish to be happy, and to take the only means of being so.

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### SECOND MEDITATION.

#### *On the other Words of the Commandment.*

*First Point.*—Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart. Can God be loved otherwise than with the whole heart ? Is it too much that a finite heart should love infinite beauty ? If I love him with less than my whole heart, can he be content, can I be so myself ? Alas, in loving Him with all the capacity of this heart of mine, I should but love Him with a love far beneath His deserts, and I should always have to pray to Him to enlarge it, so that it might be able to contain a greater love.

I should not love God with all my heart if I kept back anything from Him ; if I were determined not to pass certain limits as the proof of my love ; if I obstinately refused the sacrifice of certain things which He required of me ; if I set up for myself a plan of devotion to which I was resolved to adhere, although grace

might strive to impel me to make further advances.

In trying to ascertain that I keep back nothing from God, it is not necessary that I should give scope to my imagination, that I should pre-suppose extraordinary circumstances, wherein I may never find myself placed, and that I should take counsel within myself of what I should do under such circumstances. Many an illusion is likely to creep into my heart by these kind of suppositions, much presumption may result from them. We ought not to be sure of ourselves, or count upon what we should do before we are tempted, when we are not placed in the position. Witness S. Peter ; his experience disabused him ; it has disabused many a one since. We expose ourselves also by cowardice to fall into despondency, and a sort of despair, not feeling ourselves capable of bearing certain tests to which God puts our love.

Let us anticipate nothing ; that which we think we could do, we should not really be able to do ; and that which seems above our strength, will not be so if God exacts it of us. Let us content ourselves with examining ourselves on our present position, and seeing whether at this moment we are giving to God all that He asks of us, and whether we are not putting any secret restriction upon the sacrifice of ourselves.

- Let us say to Him with as much sincerity as humility, "Thou Who alone knowest the secrets of my heart, do not let it refuse Thee anything, nor offer any open or secret resistance to the loving pleadings of Thy grace."

The love of God does not admit, either, any division of our hearts. God is supremely jealous ; He wants the whole of it, because He deserves it ; He wants it wholly to Himself, because he is the only One Who merits it, and because He made it only for Himself. If I transfer the least affection from it towards the creature, I take it from God ; I take from Him a right that belongs to Him, and that He can yield to no one. It is necessary that I should love but Him, and love all else in relation to Him, because He orders me to do it ; and I must likewise give as much as He orders. By this means all the affections of my heart will go out towards Him as to their end, and will unite in Him, as their centre. "It is not to love Thee enough," says S. Augustine, "but to love with Thee something that we do not love for Thee."

This commandment of loving God with all our hearts absolutely forbids self-love, which makes us love ourselves, without any relation to God, and love all else in relation to ourselves. We see by this how pure our love for God ought to be, since it

is defiled by all other love of which it is not the principle and the end. In a word, the human heart should only make use of its liberty to attach itself to God; created beings should but help it to love God more, and it ought to combat against and destroy in itself all that it perceives there contrary to the love of God.

What a vast matter for reflection and for practice !

*Second Point.—Thou shalt love God with all thy heart.*—From whom do I hold my heart ? From God alone. I have been able to cultivate it ; but I did not give it to myself. Why did God give it me ? Is it that I should use it as I like, on whatever object pleases me, be it good, bad, or indifferent ? That cannot be.

But what are the good works upon which God wills that I should exercise it ? Himself certainly before all other, and afterwards upon all that He has created, considered in their connection with Him, for they have no goodness unless viewed in this light ; and if I look upon them for themselves, I look upon them otherwise than in the sight of God ; they cease to become good and useful to me ; they serve but to satisfy a vain and idle curiosity.

The proof that my heart is made for God is, that no other object entirely satisfies it ;

• that it finds no rest save in the contemplation of God. The more of sagacity and avidity there is about us, the more we advance in the knowledge of created things, which belong only to time, and pass away with time. The more we feel their emptiness, so much the more are we disgusted with them. The more we are impelled to pass from one kind of study to another, without any of them being able to satisfy our insatiable hunger after knowledge. Self-love may sustain us for a time, but reflection and experience teach us that all science that does not tend towards God as to its principal object, is but as smoke.

We want real, solid food, which fills our hearts, and leaves nothing for us to desire ; we want not a passing truth, like that of facts, which belong only to memory ; not an abstract, ideal truth, like that of numbers and figures, which please the mind, but which do not satisfy it ; but a truth fixed, eternal, immutable, substantial, and self-existing. All science worthy of the name leads to this truth, which is God. It is the foundation and the principle to which all other truths soar, as to the first and universal truth.

If I were alone in the world with God, my heart could only attach myself to Him, and to myself in relation to Him. The obligation to dedicate myself wholly to

Him would present itself to me in all its force ; it would appear to me not only to be just, but indispensably necessary. I should be continually thinking of Him, without any distraction ; and this occupation would be to me so sweet, so agreeable, that I could not be deprived of it without instantly becoming miserable. But how is it ? Has God lost the right of occupying my whole heart because He has produced other creatures, who are only so many more blessings from His hand ; who are to me so many more degrees to lift me to Him ; who speak to me of His power, of His wisdom, and of all His other attributes, in which I can and ought to contemplate Him with ecstacy ?

The right of my fellows, the intercourse whether of necessity, business, or pleasure which I have with them, do they authorize me to turn my heart from God ? Ought they not, on the contrary, ever to remind me of Him ?

In creating the world, in instituting human society, could God have intended that these things would contribute to make me love the recollection of Himself ; or that my wants, my business, the duties of my station, my connections, my studies—even those of laudable curiosity—should make me almost entirely forget Him ?

No ; the mind dwells upon what the

heart loves ; and if I love God with all my heart, I shall think of Him with all my mind. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ; and if my heart is full of the love of God, I shall speak of it with delight, whenever the opportunity presents itself, and I shall be careful to make it its master.

Without neglecting my duties or my business, I shall make it my principal duty, and my first business, to meditate upon the nature of God, on His blessings, on the truths and morals of the Christian faith, on all the reasons I have for fearing Him and for loving Him.

This is the only legitimate use to which I can turn my natural and supernatural enlightenments ; and my intention will be, that much knowledge will help me the better to love God.

*Third Point.—Thou shalt love God with all thy strength.* That is to say, that loving God with all the strength present grace gives me, and that this grace is always increased by the exercise of love, I should also from day to day love Him more. The love of the creature is strongest and most ardent at its commencement ; it becomes enfeebled even by the very enjoyment of it, and it ends by satiety and disgust. Divine love is quite contrary to this. Weak at its

commencement, it grows in proportion as we know God better, as we taste Him, approach Him more familiarly, enjoy His Presence more intimately. And as the strength to love God is altogether a supernatural power, and it is God Himself Who puts the germ of it into our hearts by the practice of charity, He increases this strength according to the good use which the soul makes of it ; the germ of love develops itself, expands, and acquires by degrees an inconceivable strength and vigour. The progress of love proceeds from itself to the Infinite ; and the rapidity of this progress answers to the fidelity of the soul, when it loses no opportunity of proving its love to God.

That is to say, in the second place, that I should consecrate to God all my ambitions, all my designs, all my actions, having no other intention than to please Him, to fulfil all my duties out of love ; to employ my talents, my wishes, my credit, my authority to make Him loved ; having an ardent zeal for His glory, and trying to further it with all my power, as much as my name authorizes me to do, as grace impels me to do, and as wise counsels rule and direct me.

That is to say, in the third place, that I must fight always, and with all my strength, against the various obstacles

which my corrupt nature, the world and the devil oppose to the love of God; and because my efforts are weak and of no avail against such powerful foes, I must have the more continual recourse to prayer, and to the other means of grace which religion gives me, and which God places at my disposal, in order to conquer them.

That is to say, in conclusion, that I should love by first suffering with resignation and patience; afterwards with quiet submission, with perfect conformity of will, and with spiritual joy, all the evils which God may see fit to send me; all those which afflict the body, which torment the mind, and which mortify the heart; whether these evils be natural, as those which happen in the ordinary course of providence, or which come to us from man; whether they be supernatural, as the temptations, and vexations of which the devil is the author, and the purifying and crucifying trials which are the work of God. Have I ever contemplated the commandment to love God in this extended sense? Have I formed for myself this idea, and how have I conducted myself in consequence? It is, however, true that I cannot restrain it without weakening the sense of the words of the commandment, which embrace all in their generality and their simplicity. Ah, my God, I have not yet loved Thee; I have not

yet reproached myself for not having loved Thee as I ought; I have never even yet seriously examined myself upon my observance of the first and greatest of Thy commandments.

Let me begin now, and continue it until I draw my last breath.

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### THIRD MEDITATION.

*On the same Subject.*

*First Point.*—If the commandment to love God for the reasons, and in the manner, into which we have just been examining, does not seem to me supremely just, I do not know God, I do not know myself; I do not think of what God is in Himself, of what He has done for me, of what He deserves from me. I do not reflect upon what God is in relation to me: my first beginning, and my last end; and how much I am bound to love Him for these two reasons.

Let me consider myself as a man, as a Christian; let me consult my reason and my faith; let me enter into myself; let me look upon what is around me; all tells me that I ought to love God for Himself, above all things and in all things, and that no

duty is as just as this, as it is itself the source of all justice ; for nothing is just if this commandment is not so ; nothing moral, either naturally or supernaturally.

If this commandment seems to me too wearisome, it is but that I listen to my blind and sensual passions ; that my pride longs for independence ; that my self-love is anxious to concentrate my affections within itself.

But ought I to listen to them ? Can I take them as judges, where the rights of God and my duty to Him are involved ?

Nothing better proves the corruption of my nature, and how far it has gone from original righteousness, than this repugnance which I feel towards loving God ; than this violence which I must do to myself in order to surmount it ; than these miserable reasons which I allege, if not entirely to release me from this duty, at least to limit its extent, and to weaken its obligation.

I complain that it restrains my liberty. What ! will God leave it to my free will not to love Him, or to love Him only as much as pleases me ? Is my liberty restrained by being ordered to apply it to the only use for which it was given me ? To fix my will : made to love what is good in the love of the Supreme Good ; to subordinate all other love to this one love, and

to forbid it to stray from it? Surely this is to rule and not to restrain it; it is to use it for my perfection and my happiness, and to prevent my making it the instrument of my degradation and my misery.

*Second Point.*—If there be a commandment capable of perfecting my faculties, it is that of loving God; it is, indeed, the only one that produces this effect. In what consists the greatness and the elevation of my understanding? Surely that it is capable of knowing God, the Infinite Being, Who is the germ of all perfection.

If the understanding is capable of this, it is evidently its destiny; it fills it; it advances to perfection itself, in exercising itself upon this great object, where it ever finds something to admire, something to praise, something which transports it out of itself, the more the sense of it deepens within it.

How small and insignificant all created objects seem to us, when viewed in comparison with this great one. We cast one look upon them, to rest our eyes for an instant from the dazzling and fatiguing splendour, that we cannot bear to look upon for long. And what do we see to admire in them, but some stray rays from the supreme beauty and goodness? It is but by reason of these vestiges that we find

- in them, that we condescend to wait and contemplate them for a while, to refresh ourselves as it were, and then to go back again to the inexhaustible source of all beauty.

What noble, what sublime ideas are those that the human mind draws from the contemplation of the Divinity ! What abundant reason, what depth, what unshaken firmness is there in every action ; what justice and what certainty in their consequences, when we subject ourselves to judge everything as God judges it ; when we force ourselves to see them as He sees them ; and when we consult only Him Who is Supreme Reason, the true and only Light of our minds ! What extravagant philosophy is that which blinds itself to deny or to impugn the existence of God, or His providence, or the necessity of a revealed religion ! O my God, do Thou inspire me with a lively horror of this mad wisdom !

In what does the nobility of the human heart consist ? In that it is capable of loving the Supreme and Infinite Good ; in that its desires elevate it to that object, and that no other good can satisfy it. It is therefore destined to possess It, and it can only attain to this possession by love. It will never be perfect, it will never be happy until it possesses It ; it attains to perfection then ; it gives itself to happiness

in loving It. If our faculties heighten or lower, widen or narrow, according to the objects which occupy them, what must be the elevation and the largeness of a heart, all the affections of which are given to God, and which disdains all that is less than God; what the lowness and narrowness of that heart which attaches itself to created things, and makes them the end of its desires? How well regulated, how pure, how holy, must that heart be which loves only Him Who is the essence of order, and purity, and holiness. What peace, what joy, what plenitude must be its portion! On the other hand, how misruled, how soiled, how guilty must be the heart which gives itself up to the creature, and is plunged into disorder, into impurity, into crime! What sorrow, what sadness, what fearful emptiness must belong to it.

The soul that loves God is necessarily beautiful and valuable; each day it becomes more beautified and more estimable in the eyes of God, and of those who view things as He does.

The soul that does not love Him is despicable and miserable, and all the more deserving of horror and of contempt, inasmuch as it has been gifted with higher natural qualities. This is the judgment which God put upon it; and if the world looks upon such a soul as amiable and

estimable, it shows that it judges by deceitful appearances, and that its judgment is not healthy.

*Third Point.*—Besides these reasons of personal interest which should make me love God, there are others far stronger and more pressing.

It belongs to my eternal good to fulfil, as much as I can, this commandment of love to God. I am always at the gate of eternity: it only depends upon God as to whether or not I may enter it at any moment. If the love of Him is in my heart I shall be safe; if not, I shall be irrevocably lost.

I do not know whether I am an object of love or of hatred, and therefore whether I possess His sanctifying grace and love in a sufficient degree. To satisfy my conscience upon so important a point, I must try as much as possible to test my good will. And how better can I do this than to dedicate my mind, my heart, and my strength, to the love of God from this very moment! Alas! that those who put off to their last hour practising this commandment, should be in danger of dying without having accomplished it!

My degree of glory and of happiness in Heaven, will correspond to the degree of love which I have given Him on earth.

There are up above divers places, and it is Love that assigns them to each. To say with the sluggish and the indifferent, that we do not aspire to the highest place, and that we are content with the lower, is language that ought not to be allowed; a way of thinking that is unpardonable; it is showing that we do not set much store upon the Kingdom of Heaven, and that we deserve, by our own fault, to be totally excluded from it.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *On the Exercise of the Presence of God.*

One of the easiest and sweetest methods of entertaining and increasing in ourselves the love of God, is the exercise of His Saintly Presence. In order to begin to make use of this means, there must already exist in our hearts a spark of love. For the sinner fears to think of God, seeing in Him but a just Judge Who condemns him. The indifferent Christian avoids thinking of God, Who reproaches him with his sluggishness, and his continual resistance to grace. The dissipated Christian, who is given over to his lusts and his desires, and who is always beside himself, will have nothing to do with a thought which obliges him to go back into himself, and to withdraw himself from exterior objects.

But the Christian who seriously wishes to belong to God, and who seriously desires to love Him, thinks of Him willingly ; he makes it his sweetest occupation, he dislikes all that takes him away from it, and he returns to it with pleasure. In a word, nothing is sweeter than to think of what we love ; above all, when the object is infinitely lovable, and that our heart finds in it all that is sufficient to satisfy it. This method is easy. Everything recalls to God he who loves God ; he sees him in every creature that has life, motion, and existence but by Him.

The sight of nature, whether he considers it in a general sense, or whether he descends to particulars, becomes for him a sort of contemplation, which ravishes him with the admiration of its Divine perfections, and which transports him with love when he thinks that God, Who has need of nothing, has made all this for man, and only for the short span of this present life. "If the place of my exile is so beautiful," cries he, "if all so enchants me, and if I am tempted to stop and to fix my desires here, what then will that country be like, where I shall see, where I shall possess, not these passing and borrowed beauties, but beauties eternal, immutable, which necessarily derive from their Being their infinite attractions ?"

The minds of the saints lost themselves

in this contemplation ; and all that they saw good and beautiful on the earth, elevated their thoughts to Heaven. They found it so easy to meditate upon the Presence of God, that they could not understand how any one could occupy himself in any other way.

How did they arrive at this state ?

Love made them apply themselves to the thought of God ; He taught them to seek and to find Him everywhere ; and this assiduous exercise of the Presence of God, to which they at first made a rule to subject themselves, gave by degrees an inconceivable increase to their love. This exercise became so familiar to them, that they practised it without thinking of it ; and so necessary, that they could not live without it, and it would have been impossible to detach themselves from it.

The Presence of God is still more easy to him who accustoms himself to withdraw into himself, to enter, as it were, into his own heart, and to study the movements of it. He has no need of external objects to help him to think of God, he finds it in himself, he carries it everywhere with him.

I have but to ask, what does my mind seek to know ? What is my object ? The Truth ; and the Truth is God. What does my heart desire ? Happiness. And happiness is the possession of God. And to

know God, without stopping at His creatures, I have but to study Him in Himself, have but to fix the eye of my understanding on His nature and His perfections, to penetrate those sentiments of rule, of wisdom, of beauty, of goodness, of justice, of eternity, of immensity, of infinity of every kind, which are my first, intimate, and ineffable ideas; the ideas upon which I judge, upon which I reason without fear of deceiving myself, the ideas to which I must make everything tend, if I do not wish to stray away; and I shall find that these ideas come to me from God, that they are ever with God, that they are God Himself.

Thus God is intimately and inseparably present to my mind. If I lose the remembrance of Him, it is because I forget myself, and what I am. He is still more present to my heart, which the desire of happiness never leaves, to which it is necessary, of which it is the life. To desire is to long to unite oneself to God, to enjoy Him. If God is the only real and essential happiness, as we cannot doubt He is, naturally, necessarily, He must be what my heart always desires, aspiring only to union and joy with Him. And if I wish it, if He is the only and necessary object of my desires, will He not ever be present with me? For this I have only to be careful not to turn away my longings from their true object.

By these frequent aspirations of the heart and mind towards God, love nourishes and strengthens itself more and more.

And there is no other method more efficacious in itself, in that it acts without interruption; nothing being able to prevent my heart and mind from occupying themselves with God. That which is for ever acting must at last produce considerable effect. Besides this, the more we meditate upon such an object as God, the more we discover His loveliness; the more we love Him, the more we wish to love Him.

The exercise of the Presence of God being an exercise of love, what can be the fruits of it except the increase of love?

God, on His side, (seeing before Him a soul that desires to have Him always present, which for that purpose does all it can do, and which reproaches itself for the least of its voluntary defalcations,) delights in its faithfulness, He redoubles His grace, He visits it frequently, He constantly makes Himself felt within it; not only has it the knowledge of His Presence, but it has the taste of it, it experiences the delights thereof. He enters into familiar communion with it, and admits it into intimate union with Him. If we only knew what it was to participate in this union, what should we not do in order

to enjoy it ? What we have read about it in the lives of the Saints, what they have written on the subject, is nothing to the bliss of those who have experienced it.

Do we say that this continual Presence of God is impossible ? That which ought to be in the heart is certainly not so, and it is that which is specially required of you. We always love the object that we wish to love, although we may not reflect upon the matter. That which ought to be in the mind is not impossible either, if we understand it as it ought to be understood.

Do we not say in ordinary language that a faithful wife is always thinking of her husband, a mother of her only son, a friend of his friend ?

Does this mean that they really have no other thought in their mind ? No ; it only means that they think of them willingly, that they think of them frequently, and that no other thought weakens that one. It is more natural and easy to us in every way thus to think of God, all the more as we should only think of everything else because of Him, and in relation to Him. When it is the command of God that I should think of certain things, when I have no other intention in thinking of them than to do His will ; when I give some relaxation to my mind, which cannot too long keep up any serious attention ; I am

thinking of God, I am abiding in His Presence.

As to the vain, vague, useless thoughts which present themselves to our minds, even at the time of our prayers; as to those which are produced by our anxieties, our fears, our anticipations, if they are all involuntary, they do not distract us from the Presence of God; if we give occasion to them by the ill discipline of our will, or the impurity of our heart, we must go to the source of the evil, and restrain, little by little, in ourselves, all that puts obstacles in our way to the ever-abiding Presence of God within us.

The Saints achieved this. We shall achieve it also, if we desire it as they did.

## THIRD DAY.

ON SOME PARTICULAR REASONS FOR LOVING  
GOD.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*On the Divine Paternity.*

*First Point.*—There is no title that gives a greater right to be loved than this one? But how is God our Father? In a way which can belong to no one but to Himself. He is the Creator of our body and our soul, and the author of their union.

I hold from Him alone my natural faculties and qualities, whatever they may be; He is my Father. I only live from one moment to another by Him. He is my Father. He is always ministering to my wants, my comforts, even to my pleasures: for I experience none, even those which are opposed to His will, unless it be He Who procures them for me. He could take from me all that He has given me, when I make a wrong use of it; He could annihilate me, and of His great goodness He does not do it.

What other father can be compared to Him ? If it is a sacred and indispensable duty that children should love their parents, how much more am I required to love God ? But faith teaches me that God is my Father, by a title more excellent than that of Creator. That is but in the order of nature ; whilst the other is above nature.

Reason clearly understands the first ; but the second is a mystery which supasses our intelligence.

God is my Father, in that He has adopted me in JESUS CHRIST, His Only Son. The title of Father is that which characterizes the First Person of the Adorable Trinity, in that It begets in eternity a Son of the same substance with Itself, and in every point equal with Itself. As I cannot beget myself in the same manner, as that would be repugnant to His essence and to mine, by a marvellous invention of His love, and in order to be my Father, as much as it is possible that He should be so, God has inseparably united the human nature to the Person of His Son, and by this means He has adopted us all into Himself, we who belong to this Son as Christians.

He is my Father by grace, as He is the Father of JESUS CHRIST by nature ; He sees me ; He loves me in JESUS CHRIST as His

- Son ; I become through Him the object of His love.

By the Incarnation He discovered the marvellous secret of extending to me the Divine union, and of dividing between His Son and me the infinite tenderness which He feels for Him. Adoption is so eminent a good, it draws me so near to God, that the angels would be jealous of it if they could be so.

What love do I not owe to God out of gratitude for this title of Father, which He has deigned to take for my sake ! To discover to what lengths my gratitude should reach, I must be able to conceive the excess of love which God has testified for me, in thus adopting me.

In the same way as the love of the Eternal Word for His Father passed into the soul of JESUS CHRIST, and was communicated to Him, so from the soul of JESUS CHRIST must His love pass into mine, and fill it according to what it is able to contain.

*Second Point.*—The rights which I acquire towards God, by the title of His adopted child, are so many more reasons for loving Him more.

*Firstly.* I enter by adoption into the Family of God, and make a part of it. JESUS CHRIST is the First-born and the

Chief of it; as a member of CHRIST, as His brother by adoption, I am incorporated into this Family. I belong to the House of God, not in the quality of a servant, but of a child. That which cannot be said of the angels, that they are children of God, is said of me; I have, therefore, the same right as JESUS CHRIST to intercourse with God, and to live in His House as a child. JESUS CHRIST makes no distinction on this point between Himself and us: " My God and your God, My Father and your Father."\*

*Secondly.* By the title of His child, I have a right to a special tenderness, to attention, and to care from my Father, Who looks upon me as His other self; Who interests Himself in me in a particular manner; Who lavishes upon me His affection and His caresses; Who lives, so to speak, in me; Who shares my pleasures and my troubles; Who devotes Himself but to my happiness, and Who glories in doing it. I have but to conduct myself as a child towards God, and I shall experience such goodness from Him, such as fathers according to the flesh cannot approach.

However disobedient, however ungrateful and unnatural I am, or I may have been, if I would but reflect upon what God has done and is ever doing for me, I should be over-

\* S. John xx. 17.

whelmed with admiration and gratitude for His tenderness and His Fatherly care. The picture which JESUS CHRIST has drawn for us of the feelings of the father towards his prodigal son, is but a feeble image of those of the Heavenly Father for sinners. If He is all this to those who offend Him, what is He to those who obey Him, and are faithful to Him ?

If He has received me into favour after my sins, if He has preserved me from all mortal danger, by what love shall I ever answer to that which He has shown for me, and that in His title of Father He has promised to have for me ?

For He wished to owe this love to me, and to put it out of His power to refuse it to me.

*Thirdly.* I have an acquired and assured right to the Heavenly Inheritance. I cannot lose it, unless I obstinately wish to disinherit myself. Faith assures me of this right, as infallibly as it assures me that God is my Father. To enable me to be frustrated of it, and lose it by any other means than my own fault, it would be necessary that God should rob Himself of the title of Father, which He could not do. But what is this inheritance, to which I have so well-founded a claim ?

It is the possession of God Himself ; it is a joy proportionate, indeed, to my ca-

pacity, but the same in itself, as that which God has in Himself.

It is His own happiness which becomes mine; and in order to communicate it to me, He will unite me to Himself, He will ennable me, He will love me in Himself.

I shall enjoy this Inheritance eternally, immutably, with the most firm assurance that it can never be wrested from me, never disturbed by any one, that no one will ever dispute with me the possession of it. My ingratitude would indeed be monstrous if I did not love with all my heart, in every accident of my life, a Father Who gives me a right in all He has, and Who unites me in all His glory and His joy.

*Third Point.*—This title of Child of God can never be lost. In whatever way I conduct myself towards God, whatever may be my sentiments towards Him, it is certain that He will always be my Father.

In the character of His adopted child, I shall always see the reason for which I ought to love Him. I shall read in it my condemnation if I do not love Him. This title will be the greatest source of joy to me in Heaven.

God, infinitely lovable in Himself, will appear to me, if I dare say it, more lovable still, viewed in the character of Father, which will authorize me to congratulate

- Him more lovingly, and to congratulate myself on His perfections, to appropriate them to myself, to look upon them as a good common to Him and to me, by virtue of the tie and the union which exist between Father and Son.

This same title of Father will be present with me in hell if I am unhappy enough to fall into its depths—the source of my most fearful torments,—of the most cruel eternal self-reproach, that I should not have loved such a Father; and of horrible despair, that it is no longer allowed to me to love Him. I knew all the loveableness of the Heavenly Father, all the right which he has upon my heart—as those who are eternally lost are allowed to know it—how should I not force myself into loving Him. Their unhappiness consists in repelling this powerful attraction with all the force of their will; my crime consists in voluntarily assisting it. They always recognize God as their Father, but they will not love Him; and they cannot love anything else. What a condition! If I meditate upon it, it teaches me in the same manner as the condition of the blessed how I ought here below to love God my Father; as rejoicing love will be the happiness of the one, and despairing love the misery of the other.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

*On the Gift God has Given me in His Only Son.*

*First Point.*—God did not stop at adopting me; He has given me His Only Son. Infinite God that He is, could He bestow upon me a greater gift, or testify for me a greater love? “He,” says S. Paul, “Who has not spared His Only Son, but Who has delivered Him up for us all, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”\* If it had been left to me to ask of God whatever token of His love I pleased, should I ever have thought of this one; and if I had thought of it, should I have dared to propose it? It is not necessary to press this point any further, the truth of it is overwhelming, and language has no words in which to express the sentiments with which the heart ought to be filled. It remains for us but to prostrate ourselves before God, and to ask Him to glorify Himself on the subject of this Divine Gift. The acknowledgment of our powerlessness to render unto Him here the love and thanksgiving which He deserves, is the only way in which we can acquit ourselves towards Him.

\* Romans viii. 32.

- Without doubt we ought to give all, and give ourselves to God the Father, Who has given to us His Only Son, JESUS CHRIST. But what is the gift of all that belongs to us; what is the gift of ourselves? What the most generous love of which we, as His creatures, are capable; how can it worthily repay the crowning, the last effort of the love of God? I belong to Him already by so many titles, what am I to add for that one which elevates Him infinitely beyond all the others?

*Second Point.*—Under what circumstances did God give me His Son? This is a thing which I must consider, as it much augments the price of the gift. He gave Him to me when I was His enemy, worthy of His curse, and of eternal disgrace. Not only did nothing in me ask it for me, but all dissuaded God from granting it to me. His love alone solicited it for me, and obtained it.

“Herein,” again says S. Paul, “was the love of God manifested towards us, that, while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us.”\* Not only did God see in me original sin, but He saw in me all those sins of which I had been personally guilty ever since the Gift, and in spite of the Gift which He had given me in His Son; and this fact, which should have but increased His anger, did not stop the effusion of His Love.

\* Romans v. 8, 9.

Why did He give me His Son ? To reinstate me more fully than ever in His power ; to re-establish me more fully in the rights of which I was deprived ; to see me no more but through His Son, as an object of satisfaction ; to extend to me the Infinite Love which He has for Him.

All this is an incontestable principle of faith. I profess to believe it, but is my heart more disposed to love ? Oh God, how have I been able to bear up to this time the enormous contradiction between my belief and my affection ? How shall I bear it when I have to appear before Thee ? But these truths are only put before me to believe, that they may constrain me to love, and the more firmly I believe the more ardently ought I to love.

*Third Point.*—How did the Father give me His Son ? In sacrificing Him for me. In immolating Him to His justice in my stead. In laying all the weight of His vengeance on His beloved Son, in order to show mercy to me—to me, His enemy—in treating Him as guilty in order to blot out all my crimes and to render me just in His eyes ; in looking upon Him as an object of wrath, in order to bestow upon me the blessings of time and of eternity.

The command once given to Abraham to sacrifice his only and well-beloved son ap-

pears to us a cruel one. We believe that God is the master of life and of death ; but to put the knife into the hand of a father that he may destroy his child, that goes far beyond our mind and our heart. This sacrifice of Abraham, which was not completed, was but the shadow of the Sacrifice of JESUS CHRIST, accomplished on Calvary by the Hand of His Father.

What must it not have cost the infinite love of the Father thus to treat His only Son ! But the love which He has for us carried Him through it. If this sacrifice astonishes our reason, it ought still more to touch our hearts, and to induce them to yield beneath the effort of our love and of our gratitude. Oh, if we would but meditate, not lightly and carelessly, but deeply and carefully ; oh, if we would but conjure God with importunity to enlighten us upon these great truths, and to put into our hearts those feelings with which they ought to inspire us ! Is not this what He desires, and what He is always ready to do ? Upon whom but ourselves could we depend if He did not do it ?

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## THIRD MEDITATION.

*On the same Gift.*

*First Point.*—For the sake of this only Son, Who has become my Brother, God bestows upon me in profusion all the grace necessary for my sanctification, and consequently for my present and future happiness: grace common to all Christians, particular and personal grace; habitual grace, actual grace; especially the great grace of prayer, which is always at my service, and by the help of which, if I use it rightly, I am sure of obtaining all the others—even that of perseverance to the end; grace so en chaining that by my faithfulness in using it, it will increase each day in proportion and efficacy; so that it will, so to speak, render the practice of good, easy, sweet, and natural, and the return to evil almost morally impossible; grace which will follow me everywhere, which is not discouraged by my long and obstinate resistance, which does not shrink from importunity, and from disturbing my false security; grace which does not forsake the greatest sinners, except at that last moment when their impenitence is consummated.

It is but right that I should pause here

• for awhile, to reflect upon the principal mercies which God has bestowed upon me since my infancy; it is impossible that I should remember all the daily mercies, and how many have been bestowed upon me, which I have not heeded. Is there one of these mercies which should not be to me an urgent motive for love, since they are all the price of the Blood of JESUS CHRIST? What sentiments ought they not to inspire in me, if I consider them as a whole? And what would it be if, by my co-operation, I had caused them to multiply almost to infinity? This is the will of God; and my want of fidelity does not limit His liberality, and ought not to diminish my gratitude.

*Second Point.*—For the sake of this Son, God has saved me from hell as long and as often as I have merited to fall into it. Master of my life, and justly irritated against me, He could have precipitated me into the abyss of misery at any of those moments when I was in mortal sin. How many have I not committed? In how many have I not persevered? I have but to count up the instances of them, if I can. The angels sinned but once; God did not wait for their repentance; He did not give them time; He at once punished their rebellion, without mercy. He could have

treated me in the same way. What stopped His Arm ? The Blood of JESUS CHRIST. It is true to the letter that God has testified as much and the same love to me in preserving me from hell, as He would to a reprobate or a demon in withdrawing him from it, leaving him at liberty to expose himself to it again.

What would be the love, what would be the gratitude of this demon, of this reprobate ! I owe no less to God for each occasion on which He has suspended the chastisement of my sin, or rather of my accumulated sins.

There are actually in hell many of the lost who have sinned less than I have done. They have not to complain of Divine justice ; and they do not complain of it. Heaven is still open to me, and my fate is in my own hands. What would be my ingratitude if I did not unceasingly bless God for His mercy, and if it were not an ever-present reason to love Him.

If you have reason to think that you have preserved your innocence, and that you have not deserved hell, you are for that reason more indebted to the Divine Goodness, and more obliged to love God ; because, owing to your natural corruption, your weakness, the strength of temptation, the many occasions of it, the influence of evil conversation, and of evil example, it is certain that you would have fallen, and

that more than once, if God had not specially watched over you, had not withdrawn you from danger, had not sustained you with His mighty hand.

*Third Point.*—For the sake of this Only Son, God has forgiven me, as often as I have returned to Him; He has forgotten my sins; and, in the words of Holy Scripture, has cast them into the depths of the sea; and He is always ready to forgive me, and to forget them.

Neither their enormity, nor my frequent relapse into them, can tire His patience, or weaken His mercy, provided I am sincerely sorry for having offended Him, and resolve to offend Him no more.

What father would thus act towards his son? He would be accused of too much indulgence if he received him into favour after such frequently pardoned, such frequently reiterated faults; he would be rightly blamed for encouraging his son to take advantage of, and to abuse his goodness.

Love has, if I may dare so speak, placed our Heavenly Father above all those accusations and those reproaches which the righteous have sometimes bestowed upon Him, because of the abuse which sinners make, and that I have myself made, of His mercy; offending Him audaciously, obstinately persevering in my sin, because of

the certainty of obtaining pardon when I ask it.

What is most just is, that I cannot return to God of myself, when I have once forsaken Him. He must let me know, when He seeks for me, that He is running after me, that He is recalling me, and that by saving mercy He stops me, and leads me back: without this I should wander without hope of return. How often has He not acted in this way towards me? And is my heart hard enough not to be moved by this excess of fatherly goodness?

Three things are inconceivable in God: His long-suffering in bearing our offences; His readiness in pardoning them; His fore-thought in holding out His hand, to raise us when we have fallen; no love, no gratitude on our part can ever equal these.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *On the Meditation of the Gifts of God.*

If there is a means capable of creating, nourishing, and augmenting in us the love of God, it certainly is by meditating upon His gifts. We are invested with them; they are immense, continual, and numberless, when viewed by the law of nature; they are incomparably greater, just as multiplied, just as continual, when viewed by the law of grace.

• Our sweetest occupation ought to be unceasingly to recall the remembrance of them, to meditate upon them, and to examine them thoroughly. This subject is inexhaustible ; it has nothing in it but what is consolatory and touching to the heart ; it is within our grasp, and does not require any great effort of mind.

The Will of God, which is shown forth in numberless places in Holy Scripture, is that we should dwell upon it more frequently than upon aught else, and that we should never lose sight of it.

He invites us to do it ; He commands us to do it for His glory, and our gain ; He has attached infinite mercy to it.

And we stupid, ungrateful, insensible, we enjoy the gifts of God the Creator, of God the Saviour, and we can hardly manage to reflect upon them, and to show our gratitude for them. We pray for them when we want them. We hardly ever give thanks or glorify Him for them.

Would it be too much for us to give an hour, or a quarter of an hour, each day to meditation upon the ineffable gifts of God ; to giving Him thanks, to exciting in ourselves the sentiments which they deserve ? Oh, how much good should we derive from this practice, and what wonderful growth the love of God would take in our soul ! Those Christians who, by their station in

life, are obliged continually to work, and who cannot give a fixed time to this holy exercise, must remember the gifts of God at shorter intervals, and must dwell on them more fully on those days which are sacred to the LORD. He does not ask for more.

But the rich, whose time and wealth are at their own disposal, whose minds are more cultivated, and who have received a better education—the rich, who do not want for books of devotion, or who can easily procure them, are not they inexcusable, if they do not employ their time and their mind in some daily meditation, some reading, which keeps alive in them the remembrance of the gifts of God?

The rich have their temptations and their dangers, but they have also their advantages with respect to their salvation and to holiness; and one of the greatest is, without doubt, liberty to employ themselves in religious objects, and for the most part an education which enables them better to understand, and to draw fruit from them.

Those who have received these advantages from God will certainly be called to account for them. "Why," He will say to them, "have you hardly ever remembered My gifts? Why have the mysteries of My religion not always been present to your

mind? Why have you not reflected upon the many personal mercies of which your lives have been one long tissue? You have had time; I even bestowed it upon you for this purpose. You preferred spending it in visits, in play, in theatres, in frivolous amusements; your mind wanted neither preparation nor cultivation, and you were in a condition to meditate and to understand good books.

You preferred exercising it on science and profane acts; often on perilous and dangerous subjects. What will they reply to this? How shall I reply to it?

For more or less have I deserved these reproaches, and it is certain that I have not given to God all the time that I ought to have consecrated to Him.

How many hours have I lost? When not knowing what to do, I tried to dissipate my *ennui* rather than give myself up to the thought of Him.

Forgive me for the past, O my God, and confirm me in the resolution which I now take, to spend the rest of my life in meditation on Thy mercies, and so to use it that I may advance in Thy Holy Love.

## FOURTH DAY.

## ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE WAY OF LOVE.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*Of the Three Ways : Of Fear, of Hope, and Love.*

SUPPOSING that a Christian is in that state of grace in which, as far as in him lies, he ought to be, and that love holds that place in his heart which it ought to do above every other virtue, there are three ways by which he can walk in the service of God and attain to salvation.

The first is the way of fear ; the second, that of hope ; and the third, that of love.

They are thus named according to their different characters ; not that either one of these three motives absolutely excludes the other two, otherwise the two first ways would not be good, the principle of love not having place therein ; and the third way would be contrary to the principles of faith, and to our present condition as pilgrims

"upon earth, because it would exclude hope. But in the first, the motive of fear is that which acts oftenest, and which makes the strongest impression ; and so in the second place the motive of hope, and in the third place the motive of charity ; nobody has the power, at least at first, of choosing his own way.

There are souls which God leads at first by fear ; others that He attracts to Him by hope ; others which He attaches to Himself by love. But His intention is that in the progress of the way, love should always gain the mastery ; that it should moderate, and at last banish fear ; that it should elevate and purify hope. He disposes each faithful heart to this, little by little ; and the duty of every Christian is to second on this head the operations of grace, which tend always to make him advance towards the accomplishment of the great commandment of the Love of God.

*Second Point.*—Those souls which are led by the way of fear are extremely struck by the rigour of the judgments of God, the punishments of hell, and all the terrible truths of religion. God makes use of fear to stop the fury of passion ; to counterbalance the attractive seduction of outward objects ; to warn the soul against the occasions and dangers of offending Him ; and to

serve as a restraint to it when it is oppressed by violent temptations. It is of use not only to withdraw us from them, but also to prevent us from contracting bad habits, and to cure us of them.

Youth is the time when it is most useful, sometimes even most necessary.

But it often happens that souls oppressed by fear, often carry it beyond the limits which God has marked for it. They like to entertain it ; they meditate upon it, and prefer to read subjects which serve to augment it ; they establish themselves, so to speak, in this way ; and it is very difficult to get out of it when God demands it of them, and when it is certain that it impedes, rather than helps their advancement.

This is certainly a great danger. Have I not fallen therein ? Ought I not to fear falling into it, if I follow my natural bent, or my imagination ?

Fear is more likely to keep from evil than to lead to good ; nevertheless it is not less necessary for the Christian to do the one, than to avoid the other. If fear induces the practice of good, it is usually that which arises from a strict and rigid obligation ; it does not often, and cannot often go further, for it contracts the heart ; it does not present to it the most attractive form of virtue ; it does not animate it by any motives capable of making

\* it surmount the difficulties which come in our way.

Fear may save us ; but it will never make saints of us. This is another very great drawback. Does it not subject me to this ? and does it not retard my progress in goodness ? Fear does not in any way lighten the yoke of the LORD ; it makes us feel all the heaviness of the burden.

For it bids us not load our soul with more than is absolutely necessary ; and, measuring our duties by our strength, which is very little, it diminishes them as much as it can ; it disputes with God, and only grants Him what it cannot possibly refuse Him.

No sweetness, no consolation, no encouragement for such as these ; the joy of the Holy Spirit is unknown to them ; they are sad, weary, dispirited, tired ; overwhelmed at every step they take ; often exposed to the temptation of giving up everything.

This is a third drawback, which may bring forth the most unhappy consequences. Have I not found it so whenever I have allowed myself to be ruled by fear ?

Lastly, fear gives too much scope to self-love ; which, however supernatural it may be in its principles, is rendered by it quite natural in its application ; making us look at the great truths of religion only with

reference to ourselves and to our personal interest ; so that it degenerates into a servile fear, which has less horror of the sin than of the punishment which follows upon it ; and which thinks less of the offence to God, than of the eternal misery which will result to ourselves : fear, in a word, which would be necessarily bad, and incompatible with love, if the apprehension of trouble was the only motive which held us back from sin.

Such is the precipice to which fear sometimes drags us, when it is ruled by self-love.

God preserve us from this drawback, more terrible than all the others !

*Third Point.*—Christian hope has a great many advantages over fear. It elevates the heart ; it animates it to the practice of virtue ; it encourages it to conquer the difficulties in the way of it, by the hope of reward ; it even encourages it to do and to suffer great things to merit this reward and to increase it.

All this is, doubtless, very good, and it is not in vain that God, who knows all our repugnance to what is right, and all our weakness, has wished to help and sustain us by the greatness of the reward which awaits us at the end of our course.

But as we are naturally self-interested,

it is to be feared that the soul, led by the way of hope, may rely too much upon this motive, to the prejudice of love.

We may expose ourselves to becoming mercenary by fixing our eyes rather upon the reward, than upon the goodness of God, Who has promised to bestow it upon us. We think less of pleasing God than of acquiring benefits ; we bargain, so to speak, with Him, and put a price upon His services. We are liable to attach glory to what we do over and above what is purely necessary for gaining Heaven ; we make our fidelity, and our generosity, of value in the sight of God ; we lean on our good works, rather than on the merits of JESUS CHRIST ; we are assured that after all we have done and suffered our reward is secure.

Again, self-love makes us ascribe to ourselves the eternal possession of God ; it looks upon this possession less with respect to God, Who will glorify Himself in us, than in respect to our own enjoyment and the good that will accrue to us from it.

In a word, that which we love in the contemplation of Heavenly felicity is rather our own ease and contentment, than the good pleasure of God.

I am willing to own that in all this there is nothing which essentially infringes upon love ; but it is nevertheless incontestable

that it is weakened by it, that its purity suffers from it, and that there is much imperfection in thus occupying ourselves with our own interests, rather than with the glory of God.

If the hope of reward is the motive which hitherto has acted most strongly within me, let me examine myself in the Presence of God, and see if I have not to reproach myself with many of the imperfections which we have just considered, and if I should not labour to purify myself from them, by turning from them into the way of love, and by giving to this motive the high place it deserves.

The two following Meditations will convince me of the preference which I ought to give to the way of love.

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## SECOND MEDITATION.

### *On the Same Subject.*

Love does not generally experience any other fear than filial fear; that is to say, the fear of displeasing God, loving Him as we do as a Father. This fear, being the daughter of love, is ever tender and delicate; very different from the fear of God's justice, and of His punishments. It causes

us to try and avoid the smallest faults, the smallest wilful imperfections. Instead of narrowing and chilling our heart, it enlarges and warms it.

It causes us no trouble, no alarm; and even when we are conscious of having committed some fault, it leads us gently back to God by a peaceful and sincere repentance.

We seek to appease God; to make amends to Him quickly and abundantly for the trouble that we may have caused Him.

We do not distress ourselves, and we do not lose confidence in Him.

Love takes from hope whatever selfish motives self-love might mix up with it. He who loves does not know what it is to bargain with God, or to do good works simply in order to increase his deserts; and by this noble disinterestedness he merits incomparably more than he otherwise would do.

Forgetting all that he has done for God, he tries only to do more; he does not lean upon himself; he keeps in view the Heavenly reward, not as a reward, but as an assurance of loving God with all his strength during eternity, and of being loved in the same way. Such is the view which he takes of happiness; looking more to the pleasure of God, and to the glory which will accrue to him from that, than to his own interests. He never excludes hope.

What! loving God and not possessing Him here on earth, shall we not wish to possess Him, and to be inseparably united to Him?

But we must put the will of God even before the enjoyment of God's presence.

And when love has attained the highest point of perfection we are disposed to sacrifice our own happiness to the Will of God, if the sacrifice is required of us; or rather we make our happiness consist in fulfilling His Will.

This must not be looked upon as a vain and chimerical idea.

It is certain that many of the Saints have endured this great test—love; and how many are there who have failed in it!

It is equally certain that all the blessed have been of this mind, and that without it we cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

*Second Point.—To serve God by love is the most simple way, for it reduces everything to one ruling motive, in which all the others are included.*

If I love God I fear Him with the fear that is most pleasing to Him, and that is most useful to myself.

If I love God, I have the most assured hope in His promises, and I believe in the

\*execution of them as much as it is possible to believe in them here below.

If I love God, I need no longer think of acquiring any particular virtue ; the practice of love embraces them all, and induces the exercise of them in a more exalted and perfect way than if I practised each for its own sake.

Love absolves me from the number of ways and means which the generality of people so anxiously seek, and which they so often vary ; attaching themselves to-day to this thing, to-morrow to that, and which serve only to embarrass them, to disturb them, and to retard their progress in the path of holiness.

Love has but one way : that is to follow the instinct of the grace which leads us to love ; it has but one practice : which is to love always, everywhere, in every circumstance. Love has but one motive, loving because it loves. Love has but one end : loving, to love. What can be more simple ? But is there one means of perfection which this simplicity does not embrace ? Are there any means which we can employ so advantageously, and from which we can derive so much profit as this ? The simplicity of the way of love draws the soul to the state of the blessed, who only see God to love Him.

If it adds hope to love, it is that the soul does not yet possess Him as they do.

What more can I say? This simplicity approaches to the state of God Himself, Who knows Himself but to love Himself, and in Whom love is the climax of all emanations.

*Third Point.*—To serve God by the way of love is the sweetest way of serving Him; it takes our hearts by storm, and our hearts are made to love. It leads our wills softly, but all the more surely, to what God desires.

Love entirely re-assures the heart, which no other sentiment can do. Fear troubles it; hope is subject to seasons of uneasiness; love knows neither the torments of fear nor the alarms of self-reliant hope.

Love inspires joy; which S. Paul places as the second fruit of the Spirit, giving the first place to love; and what joy!

A pure joy, an intimate joy, an unalterable joy, a joy which is the foretaste of that of the blessed, which keeps the soul in peace, which the Apostle places after joy. Love is never troubled.

The trouble of the soul proceeds from three causes; either from a bad conscience, or from self-love, or from the devil.

Love keeps the conscience in the best state; it works unceasingly to destroy self-love; it despises the black suggestions of the devil; it resists them, and triumphs over them.

God is peace itself; and as we only possess Him here below by love, love is the only method of enjoying peace.

This way, which is the most simple and the sweetest, is also the easiest.

If there is one thing which can aid us in the practice of virtue, assuredly it is love; which is noble, strong, generous, which counts not the cost of anything which can give pleasure to Him it loves, and which is ready to suffer anything rather than displease Him.

If love has its source in nature, if it inspires passion, and renders man capable of the greatest sacrifices of a father, a husband, for one in whom the heart is bound up, what ought not to be expected of supernatural love, which has for its object a Being surpassingly loveable, which is kindled in the heart by God Himself, strengthened by all the power of His grace, and animated by all the motives which can touch the heart?

Love shuts its eyes to difficulties, or overcomes them; it triumphs over obstacles; it throws itself into dangers, it sacrifices its dearest interests, because forgetting itself, it only thinks of what is needed by the imperious dictates of love. "Love," says S. Augustine, "feels no pain; or if it feels it, it is glad to feel it, knowing that it shows itself best in painful circumstances,

and great sacrifices. Love renders us capable of everything, and thinks everything possible to itself."

I have loved, O my God, other objects than Thee, and I have experienced the fact that love renders that easy, and pleasant which never could be done without it.

Why should I be afraid? Why should I draw back, when Thou proposest to me to try the same thing with regard to Thee?

Can Thy love have less power over me than that of a creature? Art Thou less attractive? Dost Thou deserve less? Is there less satisfaction in pleasing Thee? And if I must look to my own interest, can I expect happiness from any other love than Thine?

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### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *On the Same Subject.*

*First Point.*—Love, having for its object the avoidance of every evil, and the practice of every good, puts the mind and the heart into a perfect state of liberty.

We will not believe it, and we look upon it as paradoxical, that to be perfectly free we must allow ourselves to be the slaves of love, and to know no other law than that of

\* pleasing God. Nothing, however, is more true.

Is not God supremely free ?

But He necessarily hates evil, He necessarily loves good.

The more we are drawn towards Him by love, the more shall we become free, as He is. We shall love what He loves, hate what He hates, His Will will be ours, and the less we try to avoid it so much the less shall we be slaves. Slaves ! of whom ? Of the devil, of the world, of our pride, our self-love, of our passions, our senses, our imaginations, all that can enslave us.

These are the links and chains from which love can at once free us ! It renders us wholly dependent on God, independent of all else, really masters of ourselves, as much as we can be, or ought to be.

From whence come those pangs of conscience from which the majority of Christians suffer ? Even from the fact that they do not love enough, and that they refuse what God asks of them ; they are impelled by grace ; they make Him a thousand promises ; they take a thousand resolutions, to which they do not hold.

Thus it is that they cannot look into themselves without feeling much self-reproach, which for ever haunts them.

What doubts, what difficulties, what perplexities torment those souls who wish

to unite grace with nature ; the love of God with the love of self !

To get out of this predicament, where it is impossible to stand, there are two extremes to choose between.

One is to give up all thought of perfection, to give ourselves up to dissipation, to cast on one side every serious reflection as to the state of our souls ; the other is to dedicate ourselves, without reserve, to the love of God, and to oblige ourselves to follow Him wherever He may lead us.

Can we deliberate on the choice between these two opposite paths ?

It is a well-known fact that the instant love governs us, all doubts, and anxieties, and well-founded scruples, and often those which are but imaginary, are entirely dissipated ; that the reproaches of conscience are quieted, and that we enjoy a delicious calm.

Love, also, quiets pious and timid souls upon their inward feelings. It teaches them not to be so anxious as to their spiritual progress ; to know how they stand with God : whether He is satisfied with them ; but to give themselves up to Him, to think only of Him, and not of themselves, except in as much as is necessary to correct themselves, and to advance in holiness ; but not simply to satisfy their self-love, and to re-assure themselves ; which

re-assurances, not coming from God, are often vain and delusive.

In proportion as Divine Love takes the ascendancy over our misguided self-love, it spares us those torments which are the bugbear of the human heart; which disguise themselves in a hundred different forms; which assume a hundred different pretexts to make us think more of ourselves than of God.

*Second Point.*—The love of God either exempts us from those most terrible and dangerous temptations regarding our future state, or gives us the strength to surmount them.

How many afflicted souls are dried up and withered in allowing themselves to dwell upon this terrible doubt? Am I amongst the number of the predestinated, or am I not?

I have sinned: of that I am certain. I have deserved hell. Has God forgiven me? Has He restored me to His favour?

I am liable to die at any moment. If I were to die now, where should I go? I know nothing about it.

What fearful uncertainty: which appals, which paralyzes with fear persons of a melancholy temperament, of lively and morbid imagination ruled by self-love; which sometimes almost turns their head. More

given to fear than to hope, they see the gates of Heaven shut against them, and hell open at their feet.

Impressed with this melancholy thought, which never leaves them night nor day, their spiritual director in vain attempts to reassure them by the most solid truths of religion ; in vain he tells them that God has thought fit to keep us in ignorance of our future destiny, and of the present state of our souls, in order to preserve us from presumption, and to maintain us in that humility which is our safeguard ; that He has willed to take from us all reliance upon ourselves, in order that we might put all our trust in Him ; that it is impossible that a soul which gives itself up to Him, and which rests in His goodness, should perish, if it does all that it otherwise can to ensure its salvation.

These reasons, and others of a similar nature, make no impression upon them, and do not heal their sick souls.

Self-love, self-interest, are the root of the evil.

How is it to be attacked and uprooted ?

They must be turned to the love of God ; they must be made to understand that, if they are zealous for the interests of God, He will have a special care for theirs ; that if they prefer the Will of God to anything else, they should desire above all that it

should be fulfilled ; and with such a desire their salvation runs no risk. If they live in love, it is quite certain that they will die in love ; and that wherever they carry the love of God with them, there they will find Paradise.

It is, in truth, very difficult to bring home these reflections to a wounded mind, and to make a self-interested heart participate in these sentiments.

However, if the disease is not inveterate, if the sick person is not self-opinionated, love is the only remedy for this temptation, as it is the only preservative from it.

Either the temptation comes from ourselves, and love foresees it, or it stops the effects in destroying the cause, or it comes from the devil, by God's permission ; and then He Who proportions the help He gives to the strength of the attack, renders the soul victorious by the purity and disinterestedness of love.

For in this case it is less of a temptation than a test, and God does not send these kinds of tests but to souls capable of bearing them, and of rising above them by the generosity of their sentiments.

*Third Point.—The way of love is that from which God extracts the most glory.*

One soul which treads courageously in

this way glorifies him more than millions of others who do not tread in it.

Also it deserves, and obtains from Him special grace ; the grace of preservation ; the grace of protection, and the grace of predilection ; grace which makes it bring forth heroic acts, which renders easy all that is most difficult, and would be even impossible to others ; grace which makes it advance with rapid strides in the great path of perfection, and which carries it beyond ordinary limits.

Ordinary, and otherwise pious souls, even true and faithful ones, do not understand, and cannot understand, the state of a soul which aims at purity of love, nor the wonderful holiness which it attains. God treats as a Father those who have for Him the affection of children, and who study to serve Him by love.

As it is He who gives us this love, and that we have but to answer to it, what pleasure ought we not to take in increasing it, according to our opportunities ?

He does not allow us to lose a moment ; He furnishes us every instant with new fuel for the fire which He has kindled in us ; and he does not cease to increase it, until it is a vast furnace, consuming in us all our impurities.

He proves to us by this all His tenderness, all His paternal care. For the most

certain sign that a soul is very dear to God is when He requires very much from it ; when He demands of it all that it can give ; and when it lets Him take all that it would not itself know how to give.

This soul knows itself. It recognizes God's love for it. His inexorable jealousy, His care to rob it of everything, to wrest everything from it, in order that it may altogether and entirely belong to Him.

Love is the only way which leads us into the interior life ; which obtains for us the gift of prayer, with the blessings which accompany it ; which establishes a familiar intercourse between God and ourselves ; which makes us taste here below the sweetness of His friendship ; which unites us to Him, and changes us in an ineffable manner.

Let us love, let us think but of loving, and leave the rest to God.

That which He will do for us even in this life will surpass our ideas, our hopes, our desires.

The more disinterested we are in our aims, the more He will load us with His goodness. He sometimes grants small favours to those who ask them ; the great ones are reserved for those who do not aspire to them, and who know nothing will compare to the practice of love.

## CONSIDERATION.

*On the Thought of Heaven.*

The thought of Heaven, which seems singularly to belong to love, is a very proper one to excite us to love, if we take it in its right light.

In what will consist all my joy and happiness in heaven? In love.

What shall I do during all eternity? That which God Himself does. I shall love. I shall no longer believe, I shall see. I shall no longer hope, I shall possess. Love will entirely occupy and absorb me. My other feelings will all be reduced to that of love. And of what love?

Of a love altogether pure, altogether exempt from reflection upon myself; of a love that will so concentrate my thoughts and affections upon God, that I shall neither be able to love the companions of my bliss, nor love myself except in God, and for God. God will be all in all, as the Apostle says; of a love that will allow me so little to appropriate the joy that it causes me, that, at the first token of the Divine Will, I shall always be ready to sacrifice this ineffable joy to love, should it be required of me. Can I conceive any faint idea of such love? I shall, however,

• be called upon to exercise it during all eternity.

Such is the fire which will consume the blessed inhabitants of Heaven : as the fire of hell will burn and consume the reprobates.

Heaven is the abode of love, as hell is the place from which love is excluded. This is the most true idea which we can form of the one and the other ; and—I dare say it—it is that which God Himself entertains.

He reigns in Heaven by the effusion of His love, which He spreads abroad amongst those who compose His court : and it is faithfully rendered back to Him : no one retains any of it for himself.

It is a continual ebb and flow of love, which flowing from the Adorable Trinity, Which is its source, returns to It unceasingly.

God reigns in hell in a terrible manner, in depriving the lost souls of His love. He hates them, and is hated by them. He curses them, and is cursed by them. They did not love Him during the years of time : that was their crime ; they cannot love Him during eternity : that is their punishment.

If I could but accustom myself to look upon Heaven and hell in this light, what a powerful motive should I not therein find

to love God ! What would I not do, what would I not suffer, to assure myself of the happiness of loving Him always, and not to fall into the overwhelming misery of never loving Him ?

The measure of my love here below, will be that of love in Heaven : love alone reaches the different ranks and degrees of bliss.

There is no other distinction amongst the elect, but that which love places there.

The noblest ambition, the ambition most supremely pleasing to God, and satisfying to the heart of the Christian, is to aspire by love to the first place in the ranks of Heaven, in order there to love God more.

O God, grant me no other ambition than this : that love be everything ; that I may see it everywhere ; that I may find it in everything ; that I should not desire Heaven, that I should not labour for Heaven, except with a view to love ; that I should not avoid hell, that I should not seek to escape it, except that from it Thy holy love is banished.

## FIFTH DAY.

JESUS CHRIST THE PATTERN OF DIVINE LOVE.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*The Nature of Divine Love.*

*First Point.*—The Incarnation of the Word is, without doubt, the greatest mystery that God has brought forth, or that He can bring forth.

No other work can come near it.

But in raising, in the Person of JESUS CHRIST, a Man to the highest and most intimate union with the Divinity, what object had God in view ?

That of being loved as God deserves to be loved ; otherwise He would not have been so loved, except by a God-Man.

Any creature, however perfect he may be, to whatever degree of grace he has attained, is not capable of loving God with a love of which He is really worthy.

To love Him thus, is to love Him without bounds ; to love Him with a love which is

incapable of increase, both in its quality and its degree.

Such was the love of JESUS CHRIST.

By the hypostatical union this love was infused into Him in all its plenitude. He exercised it even on earth, and He will exercise it for ever in Heaven, according to the measure of this fulness: so that the re-union of all the degrees of love, distributed among all created beings, is in no way to be compared to the immensity of love that dwells in the Heart of JESUS.

I do not mean to say that JESUS CHRIST as Man loves God, as much as God loves Himself. This would be impossible.

But I mean that He loves God more than all angels and men together could possibly love Him.

Judge, therefore, by this how glorious to God are the design and the execution of the Incarnation, because from It comes to Him a love stupendous, above all, that none other can equal.

*Second Point.*—Let us look at the effects that this hypostatical union produced in the soul of JESUS CHRIST.

*Firstly.*—His understanding was enriched by the most sublime, the most extended, the most enlightened knowledge of the Divinity, of His infinite perfections, of all the reasons and arguments for loving Him.

He knew, therefore, in a way superior to any other intelligence, and inferior only to that of God, His infinite loveableness.

*Secondly.*—Knowledge being the foundation of love, His heart loved God as much as His mind acknowledged Him to be loveable.

All is said in saying this. But who can understand it?

To try and explain the depths and purity of love is to torment ourselves in vain.

No thought, no expression, no sentiment can arrive at it.

We must believe, be silent, and adore.

*Thirdly.*—The gift and the dedication which JESUS CHRIST made of all His being to God has answered to this knowledge and to this love. That is to say, that this offering of Himself was as willing, as entire, as irrevocable, as perfect in its every aspect, as it could be made by the God-Man.

His mind showed it to Him as the indispensable homage due to the supreme dominion of God. His Heart, all burning with love, saw but this means of testifying to Him those feelings which were excited in Him by the sight of His supreme loveableness, and the unlimited gratitude which his gifts deserved.

And His will—entirely free—gave up all its affection and devotion, without re-

serve, to the good pleasure of God, Who was known to Him.

To know God, to love Him, to give Himself to Him, these three acts followed each other without interruption, and He showed them forth from the moment of His Conception in the womb of Mary.

*Third Point.*—JESUS CHRIST has been made our Chief and our Pattern. He came to teach us by His example how God deserves to be loved, and how He wills to be loved by us.

He did not thus love God in His own Name alone, but in ours.

He fulfilled this first and greatest obligation first for Himself, and afterwards for all human nature; and we cannot fulfil it, except by Him, with Him, and in imitating Him as nearly as possible.

Also it is the intention of God, in the first place, that we should, as Christians, have a share in the Divine service and the love which He implanted in JESUS CHRIST; and, in the second place, that we should make the same use that JESUS CHRIST did of the knowledge that we have of God, and of the habitual love spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit; that is to say, that we should make use of it as He did, to give ourselves to God, and to love Him with all our

mind, with all our heart, with all our strength.

In the third place, that, the more nearly to imitate JESUS CHRIST, we should study His will with regard to His Father, referring all the features of His Life to love, which was, indeed, the great moving spring of His conduct.

I have the happiness of belonging to JESUS CHRIST. I have more or less of a share in those supernatural lights which were revealed to Him concerning the Father, concerning the obligations and the motives for loving Him, and it behoves me to increase these lights by the study of the great truths of religion.

I have reason to hope also, if my conscience does not greatly reproach me on the subject, that I have within me the practice of love, and I know that it is given to us that works may follow it.

Lastly, I cannot ignore that it is from JESUS CHRIST, from His doctrine and example, that I should learn to love God.

How have I acted upon this knowledge up to the present time? What progress have I made in Divine Love? And what resolutions do I wish to make for the future.

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## SECOND MEDITATION.

### *The Effect of Divine Love.*

*First Point.*—The Love of God made JESUS CHRIST always, and only, occupied with the interests of His Father. Remark these two words *always* and *only*. There was not one moment of His Life in which He did not honour His Father, either by His inward feelings, or by His outward actions, or by His sufferings.

His life was short, but full of unceasing love. He never thought but of His Father; He never thought of Himself, He had no regard for Himself, Love always carried Him out of Himself; and not only was He exempt from all self-love, both for time and for eternity, but it was impossible that He should possess it.

His Father's glory devoured Him, as has been written of Him: His Father's Will was His meat; and He always did what best pleased Him.

Love naturally produces these same effects, although in a less degree, in those souls which are really and deeply impressed with it. I have but to look at the lives of the Saints, to which we have already given some little attention, and I see there that from the first moment that they gave them-

selves up entirely to God they were no longer anxious for anything but His interests, His glory ; they dedicated all their time to Him, they referred all their actions to Him ; little by little they forgot themselves, to think but of Him.

Are my heart and mind thus turned to God ? Is His love the soul of my feelings, of my thoughts, of my projects, of my actions, of all my conduct. If this is not the case ; if there are intervals in my life which are not filled by love, then I still love very weakly, I am very far removed from my Pattern.

But can we be *always* and *only* occupied with the thought of God ? The soul which loves does not ask this question ; rather would it ask itself this one : Can we at any moment be occupied with any other thought than that of God ?

Love, and you will find that the thing is possible, that it is easy, and that a heart pierced with love cannot do otherwise.

*Second Point.*—Love always kept JESUS CHRIST in entire dependence upon His Father : dependence of mind. JESUS CHRIST never had, nor wished to have, a thought that was not inspired by His Father.

Dependence of heart : for although His actions were always free, they were ordered, applied to their object, and ruled by His Father.

Dependence in speech : He never spake one word of His own, or that was not put into His mouth by His Father ; this he expressly declares in the Gospel.

Dependence in every circumstance of life : He did not undertake a single thing by His own choice ; all, to the very smallest event, was determined by His Father, and He conformed to it exactly, without changing it in the least degree.

Dependence in His works : He did not undertake one for Himself.

Up to the age of thirty years He was subject to the earthly parents who represented His Father. During His public life, there was not one journey, not one sojourn in any place, not one discourse, not one miracle, which can be attributed to His own will, and which was not ordered and governed by His Father. It was the same with His devotions, the time that He gave to them, to what He had to suffer from His enemies during His Life and Passion, and the way in which He conducted Himself under those sufferings, inwardly as well as outwardly.

In a very true sense, JESUS CHRIST was always passive, He was always led in everything He did, and He made no use of His liberty, but to glorify His Father, and to co-operate in His designs. This dependence of JESUS CHRIST, greater than any

that ever has been, or ever can be, appears to me very irksome, and even alarming. I have never put it into practice, and I would rather choose that obedience which limits itself to what is positively commanded or forbidden, and which allows me to dispose of my thoughts, my affections, and my conduct as I please. What ! Not to be able to choose anything ! Not to be able to do anything of myself ! To be obliged to consult God's pleasure in everything, and to have to conform to it ! What constraint ! What strange captivity !

When I think and speak in this way, I show that I do not know the love of God, and the extent of His rights ; still less do I prove that I do not know how sweet it is entirely to depend upon Him, and how averse those who live under His laws are to freeing themselves from them.

S. Augustine said : " Love, and then do what you like ; for you will never wish anything contrary to love, or you would cease to love.

May we not say in the same way, love, so as to be able always to do as you wish, for love makes us wish all that it asks of us.

Thus we always fulfil our own will in obeying the dictates of love ; we are very glad to inconvenience ourselves and to make slaves of ourselves for love's sake.

If I have not felt this, it is because I have

not loved ; if these proofs have been rare, it is because I have not been actuated by the motive of love.

*Third Point.—Love caused JESUS CHRIST to immolate Himself to the most rigorous demands of His Father.*

He made this sacrifice when He came into the world ; His whole life witnessed its execution ; His painful and ignominious death was its consummation.

Looking only outwardly upon all this, there is something in it calculated to startle the most courageous soul ; but if we look at it in its interior aspect, the woes which JESUS suffered were incomparably greater.

And how did He make this sacrifice ?

Freely, generously, without deliberation, without reflection, on the excess of the humiliations and the sufferings through which He must pass. All was distinctly shown to Him ; His love offered itself to all ; and if greater agony had been proposed to Him, to please His Father, He would have submitted to it all.

He drank the bitter cup to the dregs with joy, and He only gave up the Ghost of His own free will, when *all was finished*.

Thus the greatest love which ever was given, honoured God by the greatest sacrifice.

And this in proportion is how I ought to

•love. To love is not to feel soft feelings, but barren ones ; it is not to make fine and faithless promises ; it is not to imagine sacrifices which we shall never realize.

To love in this way costs nothing ; or rather it is not to love at all, as it costs us nothing, and we do not wish it to do so.

To love is to give ; and what ? All that love asks ; to give it at once without regret, with joy ; it is to wish that it might ask more ; never to be content with what we give, if it is possible for us to give more.

To love is to suffer, for love's sake, all that is repugnant to our nature ; pain of mind, pain of heart, pain of body ; it is to suffer as love would have us suffer ; preferring to all other crosses those which it chooses for us ; bearing them as it would have us bear them, without softening, without consolation, either from man or from God ; bearing them as long as it would have us bear them, without complaining of their duration, even though they should be with us to our last breath.

It was thus that JESUS CHRIST loved. Do I thus love, do I wish thus to love ? All love that does not partake of the nature of His love is delusive.

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## THIRD MEDITATION.

*The Strength of Divine Love.*

*First Point.*—If in reflecting upon my feelings, I am aware that I do not possess sufficient love, *always* and *only* to be occupied with the interests of God ; to have a zeal for His glory ; to wish that He should be known, adored, loved, served by all creatures, which makes me sensible of the honour which He receives from some, and of the outrages which He suffers from others ; if I do not feel love enough to wish to live in continual and entire dependence upon His grace, willingly to make any sacrifice which may be asked of me, I can but blame myself for it ; it would be blasphemy to throw the fault upon God, as if my loving Him more depended upon Himself.

He has given me His Son ; the Heart of His Son contains the plenitude of Divine Love. It is always open, always accessible, always anxious to receive me ; I can go to It and draw love from its source as often, as abundantly, as I please ; I need never fear it will be exhausted ; I am always sure of being well received ; the oftener I present myself, the more this adorable Heart dilates for me, the more It communicates of

• Itself to me. And surely I am guilty in the extreme, if, after all this, I remain cold and frozen, being able at any moment to draw near this flame ; being able to stay near it ; being even asked to do so, and never to leave it.

When God asks me to love Him, does He mean that I should give this love to myself ? No, certainly not ; since love comes from Him, and can but come from Him.

But in giving me JESUS CHRIST, He put me into the way of loving Him as much as I wish to do, because JESUS CHRIST was given me but for that, and only received all the love but to communicate it to me. What, then, must I do ?

I must first humble, abase, and reproach myself, at having had all the love of Jesus placed at my disposal, and having hardly, or very feebly, asked Him to let me share it with Him.

Then I must go to Him with mingled shame and confidence, and beg Him to forgive my negligence and my past luke-warmness, and allow me to enrich my heart with the inexhaustible treasure of love which pervades His.

I have but to act thus : praying, pressing, importuning, resolved not to be discouraged, and my wishes will be granted, far above my desires.

*Second Point.*—JESUS CHRIST having been given me as a Pattern, I am necessarily obliged to imitate Him; and how shall I imitate Him otherwise than in His love? By this I must begin, by this I must continue, by this I must end.

For all imitation of JESUS CHRIST reduces itself to love.

Love was the first and last motive of all His virtues.

If in order to imitate Him better, I apply myself to studying Him, I shall have found a short and easy method of knowing Him thoroughly.

I have but to make love the basis of my thoughts, of my feelings, and of my conduct, and then but to trace in love every mystery, every feature of His life.

I shall but have to do the same thing with regard to His likeness, which I wish shown forth in me.

Let me make love the foundation and edifice of my perfection; but let me establish this foundation with all the solidity which must belong to it.

Love admits of no limits; love must therefore be impregnable to all attacks.

It must be stronger than death; its jealousy must be more inexorable than hell; the waters of tribulation must not be able to quench its fire, nor the waves of temptation capable of submerging it.

This is the love that JESUS CHRIST is ready to give me, if I desire it of Him, and ask Him for it sincerely ; it is impossible that He should give me any other love, because He really has none other to give. Having once laid this foundation, it will be easy for me to build upon it the edifice of all those virtues which ought to be the fruits of love, and which will never rise to any great height, or attain to any great solidity, which will be entangled and overcome at the very smallest shock, if they do not rest upon this foundation.

But what is to be the height of this edifice ? and how far shall I push it ? Its height must reach Heaven ; God alone knows the measure of it ; and if I limit it even to ever so great a distance, the building will remain imperfect.

Dost thou well understand this, O my soul ? Dost thou know that the perfection that God requires of a Christian is an edifice built upon love ; an edifice which embraces all virtues, and which carries them to their summit ?

The workman must always work at it, always renew it, always perfect it ; God will only put an end to the work by death.

*Third Point.*—But have I the courage to undertake to build such an edifice, and to carry it out ?

Love will give it me.

What it cost JESUS CHRIST to build His, to the infinite height which God required of Him, incomparably surpassed all that it can cost me.

Did He bargain with His Father ? Did He count the cost of what He must suffer ? Was He astonished with the magnitude of His troubles, or of the heavy burden which was laid upon Him ?

No : the ardour of His love counted it all as a straw ; and to apply to Him what Holy Scripture says of Jacob, this fearful path of suffering was as naught compared to the love He bore His Father.

If He could have suffered more, He would not have hesitated to offer Himself ; and we can rest assured that the love which rendered His other torments light was in itself His greatest torment.

But the torment caused by love always carries sweetness with it, however hard it may otherwise be ; it is a part of love itself, and could not be separated from it without destroying it. And so JESUS CHRIST was peaceful, contented, happy, amid the troubles which love brought Him, or caused Him to accept.

This will be my case if I love. I shall draw from love a strength superior to all work and all trouble, to all obstacles and difficulties. The more that pre-

sent themselves the more courage shall I have to surmount them. The greater they are, the more easily shall I overcome them.

Nothing is more certain than this. The first and least crosses always seem the hardest.

When love, feeble at first, has gained strength by its combats and its victories, it finds the heaviest and bitterest crosses the lightest and sweetest; instead of wishing to be released from them, and complaining of them, it wishes for new ones, and never suffers enough to satisfy itself. Thus the fire which is kindled slowly and with difficulty, when it has reached a certain point, attacks and consumes every obstacle which most opposes its progress. We have proofs of this in the lives of those Saints who walked by love in the footsteps of JESUS CHRIST.

The first steps in the path were to them the most painful. As they advanced they walked joyfully; they ran, they flew; love carried them on to the end with the swiftness of an arrow.

Nevertheless their trials increased with their onward progress.

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## CONSIDERATION.

*On the Practice of Communion.*

The holy and frequent practice of Communion is surely the most efficacious means of increasing in us Divine Love.

If every grace tends in itself to create love, or to increase it, with how much more reason must it be increased by the Author of all grace, Who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. It is essentially the Sacrament of Love. It is the most admirable invention of love.

In It, JESUS CHRIST unites Himself to us, incorporates Himself with us. He comes to us to make us go to Him.

And what do we receive in receiving It ?

Love from its source, love in its fulness, love which burns with desire to communicate itself to us, according to the measure with which it finds our hearts disposed to receive it. " Whoso eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood dwelleth in Me, and I in him."

That is to say, in other words, that He lives in love, and that love lives in Him.

But what ought to be the state of the heart, so that Communion may produce in it the great effect for which It was instituted ?

See nothing in the reception of the Body .

of JESUS CHRIST but love : seek for nothing but love, and you will find it There.

Let love prepare you, let it introduce you into the guest chamber, and let it not leave you when you come away from it.

You have recourse to a thousand methods, in order to communicate worthily. Have but one, which in its simplicity embraces all the others, and surpasses them by its excellence.

Know yourselves, with as much truth as with humility, to be incapable of acquitting yourselves worthily by your own efforts of so holy a service.

Trust yourselves to love, submit yourselves to it, give your hearts up to it.

Dwell simply, quietly, and peacefully upon the love that JESUS CHRIST has shown for you, and of that which in return for it He expects from you.

Tell Him that you wish to love Him, and that you receive Him only that you may love Him more.

But beware, in the first place, of not seeking in Communion only the sweetness of the sentiments of love.

It is the strength of love, it is its generosity, it is its disinterestedness, that you ought to desire, and not to seek to please the sensuality of self-love.

Secondly, do not think that love is only given you during the time of Communion.

You should return to your own homes on leaving the Holy Altar, with more love than you carried thither with you; and so with the desire and the determination to be more firmly and closely united to God, to be more attentive and more faithful to grace; more watchful over yourselves; more courageous to fight and to do violence to yourselves; more charitable towards your neighbour, more gentle and patient in bearing with him; more careful in fulfilling the duties of your station; more generous in giving to God; stronger in suffering all those crosses which may come into your way.

For all this is but love put into practice. It is that you may the more perfectly acquit yourselves of these various obligations of the Christian life: that you go more or less often to the source of all love, nourishing yourselves, fortifying yourselves, enriching yourselves, by the reception of the Adorable Body of JESUS CHRIST.

By thus communicating, by drawing these fruits from Communion, the Saints have attained to the perfection of love: you will attain to them, also, in following the means I have pointed out to you.

But in order to practise these means with success, you must before all wish to belong to God; without reserve, you must resolve to refuse Him nothing, and not

- willingly to commit the smallest offence deliberately; otherwise you would be deceiving yourselves, and lying to your own hearts, when you think you are uniting yourselves to JESUS CHRIST by love, having no other motive and no other aim in receiving Him.

Let us say a few words on the presence of the faithful at the Holy Eucharist.

What is the Eucharist?

It is the memorial, the renewal, the continuation of the Bloody Sacrifice of Calvary, of that great Sacrifice of Love, in which JESUS CHRIST offered Himself as the Priest, and was consumed as the Victim. The same thing happens in a bloodless manner upon our altars.

JESUS CHRIST is really there as Priest and Victim. He offers Himself with the same love to His Father, in His own Name and in ours.

How better can we assist at the Holy Eucharist than by dwelling upon that ineffable love; not so much by reflecting upon it as by feeling it; by offering ourselves with JESUS CHRIST and by JESUS CHRIST, as a holocaust to God, to be consumed by the fire of His love.

In thus presenting to Him our hearts, a divine flame will go out from the Holy Altar, which will embrace and consume them.

Let us kneel before Him present on our Altars, in order there to entertain and to increase our love.

The mystical life of JESUS is a life filled by love ; love alone has placed Him there where we can find Him.

Let us recognize this excessive love ; let us contemplate Him in silent adoration, and pray Him to keep us humble before Him, even as He humbled Himself in the Presence of the Father.

We only go to JESUS CHRIST for our own interests ; we only entertain Him for the sake of our wants. Have we any as great as that of loving God, and of loving Him always more and more ?

Let us feel this deeply ; let us insist upon it, impress it upon ourselves, importune Him for this. It is the most efficacious method of obtaining all the others.

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But recently a skilful pen has translated one of the works of Jean Niolas Grou, and there given us a short account of the life of the soul of one who truly was one of God's hidden Saints. No more need be said here.

In the following pages, which are altogether rendered in the author's own words,

and in which only some few paragraphs, which perhaps might have been a stumblingblock to English prejudices, have been entirely suppressed, we see shown forth the ruling spirit of that love of God which was the mainspring of Père Grou's life.

May it teach others to walk in the way of that perfect liberty in which the good Priest found all his earthly happiness; that liberty which is summed up in the words of S. Augustine, and to which Père Grou so constantly refers.

Love, only love, and then do anything you like.

## SIXTH DAY.

ON THE QUALITIES, THE EFFECTS, AND THE  
MARKS OF DIVINE LOVE.

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## FIRST MEDITATION.

*On the Qualities of Divine Love.*

*First Point.*—The love of God has three principal qualities: extent, strength, and disinterestedness. By the nature of the human heart, the desires of which always tend to the Infinite, love, no less than the other passions, knows no limits.

If it has any, it is not the heart which defines them, but reason, or faith, or the preponderance of one object over another in our affections or our thoughts.

But neither reason nor faith, nor the preponderance of any other object ought to put any legitimate limits to the love of God.

On the contrary, reason and faith agree together to remove from it all limits; and other objects being nothing in themselves,

\*and only being loved in relation to God, cannot authorize us to limit His love.

Thus, on the part of God, of the infinitely loveable Being, love, which of itself tends to equalize His loveableness, can and does grow to infinity, and is not necessarily limited to the finite capacity of the creature.

This species of infinity resembles that of number and of measure, which, always complete, are capable of augmentation to infinity.

On the part of him who loves, Divine Love is always aspiring to become greater ; it never stops, never proposes to itself a limit ; the heart dare not say :

I stop there ; I will not love beyond that point. Divine Love gives all, or wishes to give all, and keeps back nothing ; it suffers all, or wishes to suffer all, and excepts nothing. It knows neither management nor human prudence ; it does not reason ; it does not foresee ; it does not apprehend any consequences.

Guided by an instinct superior to reason, it faithfully follows this instinct ; blind for itself, but enlightened in itself. Its greatest wisdom is to be pushed to the verge of foolishness. Did not JESUS CHRIST thus love His Father, even to the foolishness of the Cross, as the Apostle expresses it ?

A God Who made Himself man ; Who was born a child, and experienced all the

weakness of childhood : Who obeyed His creatures ; Who allowed Himself to be despised, calumniated, persecuted, outraged, overwhelmed with torments and opprobriums ; Who died a death of shame, to testify to God His Father how He loved Him ; what is all this to human sense but an inconceivable degree of folly ?

But to the Divine sense it is the most sublime wisdom. A God-Man could not love less.

When a passionate lover sacrifices joyfully all good, rest, reputation, health, even life itself to the object of his love, we say it is folly ; and we are right, because the object is not worthy of such sacrifices.

But when we renounce the world, with all its riches, its honours, and its pleasures, for God ; when we crucify the flesh for God by all kinds of austerities ; when we sacrifice to Him, if it be necessary, our health, our reputation, our life ; when we go even beyond this, and when we place the good pleasure of God before our own happiness, it is no longer folly, it is supernatural wisdom, approaching more or less to that of JESUS CHRIST. Why is this ?

Because God deserves all these sacrifices ; because we owe them to Him ; because we cannot possibly lose anything by giving all to God, since we acquire by

so doing the ineffable possession of God Himself.

*Second Point.*—The second quality of the love of God is strength. And what kind of strength? A strength to which nothing resists, which throws at its feet the world with its attractions and its threatenings, the devil with his temptations, which triumphs over the softness of the flesh and the corruption of nature; a strength which conquers the most violent passions, which overcomes the most inveterate habits, which weakens and humiliates self-will, and destroys self-love; a strength which wrestles against God himself, and the tests through which He makes a soul pass.

See the strength of love in the martyrs; see it in the hermits; in the religious of both sexes, who have embraced and endured the most austere lives; see it in those illustrious penitents whose mortifications of all kinds frighten our imaginations, and appear far above our natural weakness; see it in those apostles and missionaries who, burning with zeal to preach JESUS CHRIST to idolatrous, barbarous, and savage nations, were stopped by no difficulties, no dangers, no fatigues, and who looked to the happiness of shedding their blood for JESUS CHRIST as the reward of their great abours.

See it, lastly, in those souls whom love has led by extraordinary ways, by the cruel paths of the Cross, and who have been its voluntary victims by extreme woes, which are well known only to God, and which the human mind would fail to appreciate.

Love is real only in proportion to its strength. If it is intimidated, discouraged, or draws back at the sight of what it must do or suffer, it is weak.

I know that it only acquires strength by degrees, and that we cannot say that a soul does not love, or that it is not yet capable of certain efforts of courage or of patience.

A child may be very strong for its age, although he is weak in comparison to a full-grown man. But as God, Who is infinitely wise, proportions to our actual strength that which He requires of us, our love is weak when it yields to daily circumstances, and if it does not second the operations of the Holy Spirit : it is weak if it is not faithful in the small things which present themselves to us at every moment, and if it constantly varies between fervour and relaxation ; it is weak when it succumbs to the least obstacle ; it is weak, in a word, and very weak, if God asks of it one thing which it is determined not to grant to Him.

*Third Point.—Disinterestedness is the*

third quality of Divine Love. It is essential that love should be disinterested ; that is to say, that it should attach itself to its object for itself, and not in consideration of the good that we have received from it, or that we may hope to gain from it.

These things are opposed to love ; they can produce it and increase it, but they must not be the object of it.

If I love God only because of His gifts and His rewards, it is not really God Whom I love, but His gifts and His rewards. Truly to love God, God Himself must be the object of my love, without my caring for what He gives me, or what He promises me.

I agree that His gifts and His promises give me reason to know, to admire, and to love His goodness, His liberality, His magnificence.

But to love these perfections in God is to love Himself.

I agree, further, that eternal happiness being promised only to love, this desire which I have to be happy is a powerful motive for loving ; but the motive of love is not the object of love. There is, therefore, a love of God which accompanies and follows gratitude and hope ; but God in Himself, ready and desirous to communicate Himself to us, is properly the object of my love.



This is clear; and it will be easy to prove that we do not understand it otherwise, by referring to the love which a man entertains for his fellows. Unhappily self-love, which only looks out for its own interests, insinuates itself into the love of God, and soils the purity of it, by its mixture with it. It turns our eyes from our Benefactor, our Consoler, our Remunerator, and fixes them on His gifts, His consolations, His rewards; it causes us to attach ourselves to them beyond measure; to seek for them, and to enjoy them, in a spirit of appropriation, because we find in them our well-being, and so to serve God principally to this end.

This self-love is not criminal, so long as it does not take us from the obedience due to God; but it is impure.

And as the love of God allows of no impure element, it seeks with all its strength to get rid of it.

Thus, as soon as it has possessed itself of a heart, it seeks to purify it from self-love, it does not exclude from it—God does not wish that it should—the motive of interest—but it subordinates it to more noble and exalted motives; it submits it to the good pleasure of God, and does not allow it to be the end of our desires, and the one aim of our affections.

We can, with ordinary grace, carry our love to a certain degree of purity.

The very uncertainty in which we stand with regard to our eternal destiny is a reason why we should give ourselves up to God, and acquiesce, by love, to whatever He may please to order in our lot.

God forces this acquiescence from many dying souls. He allows others to experience horrible temptations against hope, and falsely to persuade themselves that they are reprobate, and by a sublime effort of love they make to God the conditional sacrifice of their eternal happiness, continuing to serve Him, and to perform heroic acts of virtue, to suffer for Him, solely for His sake, without being sustained in any visible manner by the great motive of hope, which nevertheless still exists in the depths of their heart, and is firmer than ever, but purified, perfected, and as it were absorbed by love, which, like fire, in some way draws into itself all other virtues.

Heaven is closed against self-love; all motives of self-interest are banished from it.

Naught is known there but the interests of God, His glory, and His good pleasure. We do not think of ourselves as ourselves. This demands our most serious consideration.

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## SECOND MEDITATION.

*On the Effects of the Love of God.*

*First Point.*—Three things depend upon myself, and I am able by the help of God's grace to use them well: my thoughts and my intentions, my desires and my affections, my projects and my actions.

This is the effect which the love of God will produce upon these three things; not to lead me all at once to perfection, but to show me the way to it, little by little, all the more rapidly according to the measure of my love, and my faithful adherence to its teaching.

If I love God sincerely, the thoughts and intentions of my mind will have as their principal object all that concerns Him.

I will think of Him willingly; I will speak of Him with pleasure, and with all the interest that He deserves. I will preserve His Holy Presence within me; I will avoid all vain thoughts; and I will look upon as such, all those that distract me, and turn me from God, whether they really affect me, or whether they only amuse me.

If I sincerely love God, my desires and my affections will be dedicated to Him. I will allow nothing to share my heart with

Him; I will attach myself to nothing that He does not like, to nothing which will weaken or which will deaden in me the habit of love, to nothing which will not help to strengthen and increase it.

Notice these three degrees.

The first will inspire me with an aversion for all bad or dangerous attachments; the second will keep me from all vain and useless attachments; the third will lead me to sanctify by love every allowed and legitimate attachment.

If I love God sincerely I will form no project which does not either directly or indirectly tend to His glory. I will perform no action that can displease Him. This is but little. I will try and do nothing but with the view to please Him.

Can the love of God abide in me if it is not master of all, if it does not rule and govern all, if all does not take root in Him as its beginning, and does not return to Him as its end?

For by sincerely loving God I do not mean that we should simply have the habit of love, which is but a feature of love.

The child receives this in Holy Baptism, and he does not love because of this.

I mean that we should practise the habit. If you do not practise it much you do not love much.

When you begin to practise it often,

always desiring to practise it more, and never being satisfied with yourself upon this point, you will love much ; and if you go on as you have begun, you will love more and more.

*Second Point.*—I am dependent upon God in three things, in which I ought to prove my love to Him.

*First.*—In all that belongs to the natural order of His Providence.

If my love for God is sincere, I shall approve of all His dealings with me ; I shall acquiesce in them willingly ; I shall conform to them ; I shall take care not to complain of them, nor to murmur at them, nor to try vainly to rid myself of them.

This goes a long way ; and it is a great and continual exercise of love, especially for those Christians who are engaged in worldly affairs.

From whence come all those repinings, all those complaints of the rich as well as of the poor, of the great as well as of the small, of the healthy as well as of the sick, relative to the accidents of life ; the ills, the troubles, the reverses to which every one in every station is exposed ? How is it that their desires are almost always opposed to their experience, and that they are ordinarily dissatisfied with their present condition ?

• It all proceeds from the lack of love. Let them love God. They will bless Him for what they are, for what happens to them ; and their will, always subject to His, will never be contradicted.

Has love produced this effect in me ? Let me see if it is so.

*Secondly.*—I depend upon God for what belongs to His Spiritual Providence ; such as the external means of grace, which, according to time and place, are more or less abundant, more or less within my reach ; which are sometimes granted to me, sometimes denied me, according to the dictates of Providence ; for those internal blessings of which the dispensation is unknown to me ; and which the Holy Spirit bestows in whatever manner and whatever measure pleases Him ; for the temptations, sometimes of one kind, sometimes of another, of more or less violence, which assail me when God allows it, and from which none other than He can deliver me ; for the spiritual crosses, with which the whole life of the Christian is sown, which are not of my choosing, and of which the object is to make me die to myself ; for those consolations which do not come to me when I expect them, and which I think I so sorely need, and which disappear so quickly when I wish to retain them ; in fact, for all those

vicissitudes which compose the spiritual life.

The love of God has a wide field here, and produces marvellous effects.

It teaches me in all that concerns my sanctification to consider all that concerns the glory of God, which is the great end He expects therein ; to believe that He, being infinitely wise, chooses the means most suitable for me, and most salutary to my present wants ; that desiring my salvation more ardently and more efficaciously than I can desire it myself, He will achieve it, if I trust to Him all that relates to it, and if I labour faithfully to assist His designs ; that being infinitely wise and good, He can and will make up by Himself for all those means of which He thinks fit to deprive me ; and that He will make up for them infallibly, if I trust in Him, and if I let Him do as He will, without in any way disturbing His scheme by my restless activity.

In a word, the effect of love is to sanctify me and to make me happy, in keeping me quiet, strong, unchangeable, under God's leading.

*Third Point.*—The third thing in which I depend wholly and entirely upon God's supernatural providence, is my perseverance to the end, and the state in which I shall

• die. And it is in this that love produces the greatest effect.

In the first place, it quiets me in the uncertainty of my present state as to whether or not I am at peace with God ; it enables me to say with S. Augustine, " My conscience, O my God, answers me, without any doubt, that I love Thee."

This is an ineffable consolation that love bestows upon itself in the depth of my heart.

If I love God ; if I am certain of it ; can I not equally assure myself of His love for me ?

Doubt ought to find no place in my heart ; I should not love Him if I were not loved by Him.

And then love does not allow me to feel any trouble or uncertainty for the future ; it forbids all vain and dangerous curiosity ; it bids me rest in firm and humble confidence. It even inspires me with a generous self-abandonment, in letting me persuade myself confidently that whatever may be my lot in eternity, if I love God it is impossible for me to be unhappy.

Nothing but a wilful act on my own part can, either in this world or the next, rob me of the treasure of Divine Love ; and when this love has reached a certain stage, although it is still possible I may lose it by my own fault, I feel an inconceivable horror

in even thinking of the possibility that I could ever consent to such a loss.

The temptations and the tests, which we have so happily escaped, are almost a guarantee to us that this will not happen. Nothing, therefore, can prevent our exclaiming with S. Paul :

"I am persuaded, that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in JESUS CHRIST our LORD."

When shall I love enough, so as to be able thus to speak with as much truth as confidence ?

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### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *On the Signs of the Love of God.*

*First Point.*—All these things which we have said on the effects of Divine Love, are so many marks by which it is easy to recognize it in ourselves.

And what follows is still more to be relied upon.

Love which confines itself to the outward forms of religion, and which produces no internal feeling in the heart, does not de-

serve the name of love ; and if we have the habit of it, it is a habit which lies idle and useless.

How many Christians are there who know no other prayer than vocal prayer ; who pray only with their lips, with coldness and insensibility ; who are present at the Holy Eucharist ; who approach the tribunal of penance, and draw near the Holy Altar with the same feelings ; who seldom think of God or of JESUS CHRIST.

Can they say that they love ? Can they hope to retain the habit of love, when they never put it into action ?

And do they not often lose it, sometimes without even reflecting upon it, when their sins are only those of thought and of desire ? Are they not liable to fall at every step ? If I once lived in this state, what thanksgivings do I not owe to God for having taken me out of it ; and what care ought I not to take, so that I may not again enter into it ?

This misfortune sometimes happens unawares to the most devout souls, if they do not keep on their guard, if they neglect themselves, if they are not careful to retain and kindle their love.

The corruption of nature draws us unceasingly to negligence and laxity ; we must always battle against it : because if we once yield, we run the risk of being

carried away, and our fall becomes the more rapid.

Keep me, my God, from that which has been experienced by so many others, who had made more progress than I have made in Thy love. Make me watchful and vigilant against the least sign of coldness ; all ought to alarm me in so vital a matter.

*Second Point.*—Love which confines itself to sentiments and protestations, and that produces no effects, is delusive.

Such is the devotion which feeds only upon visible things ; which tries to procure them ; which ceases not to ask them of God, and which pleases itself by self-love, when it obtains them ; which is miserable without them, and which leaves everything, if it is deprived of them for long.

You take pleasure in the feeling of love, because it is sweet ; you very seldom dive into its effects, because they are painful ; you disbelieve its proofs, because they are bitter.

Is that love which always wishes to receive, and which never wishes to give nor to suffer ? What should you think of any one who loved you in this manner ?

The devil often is at the bottom of this kind of devotion ; he counteracts the operations of grace ; he puts false feelings, he spreads false sweetness into hearts which

\*are only too eager for it, and he easily succeeds in deceiving them.

God allows it, in order to punish them for their selfishness.

They deceive themselves also by taking for supernatural effects, that which is but an effort of the imagination, or which proceeds from a passionate temperament, brought as it were to bear upon the feelings and to draw forth some tears, some sentiment of tenderness.

Visible love is good. God gives it to us to attract us to Him ; to strengthen us at the beginning, when we are so weak, to destroy in us bad habits, and to make us contract good ones. But as He never bestows a feeling for that feeling's sake, or only that we should enjoy it, .we must not attach ourselves to it ; still less must we make it the rule and measure of our love to God : because the feeling does not depend upon ourselves, it comes and goes as God wills that it should ; and if the effects do not answer to it, it can but hurt us.

*Third Point.*—True love is that which gives all to God generously and joyously ; which always wishes to give Him more ; which is never satisfied, so long as there is anything left to give Him. True love gives all that is most dear to it, that costs

it most to give ; it gives it in spite of all the repugnance of nature, and all its efforts to retain it.

It is sufficient for it to know that God has expressed His wish ; it knows no peace until He is satisfied with it. If it sometimes resists, if it grants but a part, it reproaches itself, and only succeeds in calming itself when it has willingly given up all.

Then it applauds and congratulates itself, as though it had achieved a great gain. The real lover suffers willingly for God's sake all that can come to him from man, all that can come to him from devils, all that can come to him from God Himself.

He suffers in his possessions, in his honour, in his body, in his soul.

He allows himself to be robbed of all, divested of all ; so that, reduced to the last state of nakedness, he can say with truth, Thou art my God, and Thou art my all.

Love is a purifying fire ; destroying, consuming all that clings to corrupt nature and self-love ; it is a fire which feeds itself upon sacrifices, which insists upon voluntary victims, and which hates the smallest raid upon the holocaust.

Love is sweet in its birth, strong and rapid in its progress, violent and tyrannical in its consummation.

It first sweetly solicits the will, and gains it by its attractions ; then it exacts from it with authority, all that is in its power to give.

It wrenches from it with a powerful hand all that it does not know how to dispose of, and makes it yield so subtle and profound a consent to all its demands, that it does not perceive what it is doing, and all seems to be done in spite of itself.

It is not necessary for me to seek to find out whether I possess this sign of love in all its perfection ; but let me ascertain if I have at least the first features of it, and if I have begun to give up some part of this miserable human *self*, which it demands entirely, and which it mercilessly pursues, so that it may at length destroy it. Do not let us form any projects of sacrifice before God asks them of us ; but by His grace let us resolve not to refuse Him a single one, when He does ask it at our hands.

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#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *On Purity of Intention.*

No one is ignorant that it is the intention which induces the moral good of our actions ; that if the intention is right and pure, the action is pleasing to God ; all the more

pleasing according to the measure of its rightness and purity. This is what Jesus meant when He said : “ If thine eye (which is the intention of the soul) be single, thy whole body (all thy actions) will be full of light ; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.”

As love causes the soul to purify our intentions, so the study to avoid in our intentions all that can soil them, or detract from their purity, helps us infinitely to increase and to purify our love ; and it is for this reason that those hearts which are really embued with the love of God, examine themselves with so much care and strictness as to the motive of their actions.

The intention is right when it makes God its object, and looks to Him directly, and without turning from Him. It is not right when, instead of resting on God, it turns towards the creature.

The intention is pure when it dwells upon God for His own sake ; when it considers His will and His good pleasure above all else ; and that even when it allows another motive, such as hope, to influence its actions, it does not allow it to lie dormant ; so that we should not leave off doing the thing acceptable to God, even if we lost sight of the hope of the reward.

The intention is not pure when the motive of pleasing God, and of doing His Will

for its own sake, is not predominant, but that some other intended motive has the ascendancy over it; so that I should not perform the action if I did not discover in it only the good pleasure of God.

How still more impure it is when it allows some sordid self-love to enter into it, such as temporal interest, vainglory, the desire to please others.

These sordid motives of self-love often influence the actions—good in themselves—of imperfect Christians, who love God but feebly, and who lean much upon themselves. It is very rarely that their intention is right, and that it tends truly to God. Very few of their actions are performed from a supernatural motive; and they must not expect any reward from God, for they are not performed for His sake.

It is still more rare that their intention is pure, and that something does not creep in and tarnish its brightness, and take away much of its value.

It sometimes, indeed very often, happens that our intention is right and pure when we begin an action, and that afterwards we take some crooked view of it, some secret return of self-love comes to us—some vain satisfaction with ourselves, some desire of attracting the esteem of others, or some rejoicing at having obtained it.

The greatest saints are not always ex-

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empt from these sordid feelings ; but they resist them, they reject them from the moment they perceive them, and they reproach themselves with the smallest neglect of these duties.

Love teaches them two things.

The first is to set before themselves in all that they do, naught but what is worthy of God ; the second is to allow no low, interested, imperfect human motive to enter in and soil its purity. These two things, which are of continual and daily experience, are the sum of the examination which the saints unceasingly make, of their inward sentiments and feelings ; they are but the love of God put into practice, and it derives from them a wonderful increase.

But where it is most necessary to purify our intentions is in what directly affects the service of God.

We must, as much as possible, in our pious exercises, and in the Christian virtues which we practise, and in the temporal and spiritual troubles which we have to suffer, put before ourselves, before all things, the Glory of God, the Sanctification of His kingdom in ourselves and in our neighbours, the fulfilment of His Holy Will, even as JESUS CHRIST teaches us in that prayer which we repeat so often, and to which we pay so little attention.

Without excluding the motives of fear

and hope, which do no harm to love, when they are subordinate to it, we ought to act so that love should always be the mainspring of our intentions; that it should arrive at that state of perfection where S. John says "it casteth out fear," and that it should take from hope every vestige of self-love, in the prospect of eternal happiness.

That my intention in fleeing from all evil, should be that sin is an offence to God; that it is supremely displeasing to Him, and that there is nothing which I should not bear rather than displease Him; that I should have the fear of a child, and be more apprehensive of irritating my Heavenly Father, than of experiencing the effects of His anger.

That my principal intention in the practice of good, should be that God commands and desires it of me; that the more holy I become, more close will become my union with Him, more nearly shall I resemble Him.

That in all my prayers, my communions, my other practices of piety or of mortification, I should consider my own sanctification only after the glory of God and His good pleasure; so that, absolutely losing sight of myself, God shall be all to me, and I shall refer all to Him.

## SEVENTH DAY.

## ON THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*Giving Ourselves to God.*

*First Point.*—If we wish to love God sincerely, with all our hearts, we must begin by giving ourselves up entirely to God, so that He may do in us all that pleases Him.

Thus to give ourselves to God, is entirely to renounce ourselves, in order to put ourselves in His Hands ; it is to wish no longer to belong to ourselves, or to dispose of ourselves, but to give ourselves up to Divine Grace ; to follow all its directions to God's Providence ; to conform to all its dictates to God's will, that it may fulfil His good pleasure in us.

This gift of ourselves is a great act of love ; we are incapable of it, of ourselves ; and we need a special grace from God to enable us to offer it.

He does not refuse it to those who ask it of Him, and really wish to obtain it.

But the generality, even of truly pious persons, have not this real and efficacious desire ; they wish to give themselves up, and they wish to keep themselves back, to follow grace, and yet not entirely to renounce nature.

Nevertheless, until we have made to God the full, entire, and irrevocable gift of ourselves, we can only enter into the exercise of love at short intervals, and not with that continuousness which makes the Christian life a life of love.

But what do I desire upon earth, if I do not aspire to this life of love ? Is it not to such a life that I am called in Heaven ?

This life will be my bliss : is it not the only object of my desires ? And do I not wish to begin it here below ?

Oh, my God, let me not lose sight of this meditation, that I ought to give myself to Thee as perfectly as Thou desirest it, and that I should desire it myself for Thy glory and my own happiness.

*Second Point.*—The principal reason why we must thus give ourselves to God, if we would walk in the way of love, is that love springs from God ; that it is from Him that it comes to us ; that He gives it in proportion as we give ourselves to Him ;

that He inspires the practice of it, furnishes the opportunities for it ; that by His grace He makes us show forth acts of love, and puts us in the way of sanctifying by love, all our thoughts, all our desires, all our actions.

For in all this we can do nothing of ourselves : it is necessary that God should teach us ; that He should be the first to act ; that He should help us to co-operate ; that He should produce within us, and more than we can do, our co-operation.

For in order that God should make us love as much as He desires, and that He is able and willing to render us capable of, it is necessary that He should dispose of our hearts as He pleases ; that consequently our hearts must belong to Him, and that He should be the Master of our liberty by a free gift on our part.

Otherwise we shall disquiet Him, we shall thwart Him, we shall put obstacles in the way of His designs upon us. He will wish one thing : and we shall not wish it.

Is not this what has happened to us hitherto, and what has been the sole cause of our sins and of our imperfections, of the little progress we have made in the way of love ?

What is it that we have opposed to God ? our own will.

And why have we opposed it to His will ?

Because we have not given it up to Him as we ought to have done.

We have put restrictions and exceptions upon it ; our engagement with Him was only up to a certain point, and then we wished to be free.

We have allowed Him, so to speak, to cut away the branches of *self*, and we have reserved to ourselves the trunk and the roots.

And that is what has stopped God in the work of our sanctification. He wishes to have all, in order to work freely in us ; His plan is fixed ; He will execute it, if nothing on our part opposes it ; and nothing will oppose it, if our will is at His disposal ; if we are no longer anything to ourselves, but wholly belonging to Him.

Nothing is clearer than this, nothing more certain.

*Third Point.*—We must doubtless be very generous thus to give ourselves to God ; but we require no less courage and faithfulness, in order not to take back the gift.

For, in the first place, it is easy to give ourselves up in a general way : it is more of a promise than a gift ; but when it comes to the test, and we have really to

divest ourselves of everythiug in the measure that God asks it of us, it is then that we suffer, and that we experience all the difficulty of the sacrifice.

Nature will go back to what it has given up, it regrets it, and if it cannot retain it all, it tries at least to keep part of it.

It is not an easy matter to persevere in prayer, in spite of the dryness, the temptations, the desolations, the apparent neglect of God Himself, which come in our way ; to continue to serve Him with the greatest exactitude, and to reject all softness from His creatures ; to practise without relaxation all outward and inward mortification : that of the senses, by privations and hardships ; that of the imagination, by ruling and making it captive ; that of the passions, by fighting against them, and by refusing them what they desire ; that of the mind, by stopping all reasoning, by suppressing all reflections that grace forbids ; in allowing God to hold it, even for years, in a state of stupidity, of darkness, and of blindness ; that of self-will, in thwarting its inclinations, and its aversions, and in thinking it good that others should contradict it ; in never letting it anticipate, nor resist, nor depart from the Divine will ; in continually adding sacrifice to sacrifice, although God does not seem to heed them, or to pay the smallest attention to them ;

that, on the contrary, He redoubles His severities according as we show Him more love, and that His inexorable jealousy pursues self-love into its most secret hiding places. Ah! what courage do we need in order not to make a backward step: not to refuse to God in detail what He has given to us in full!

In the second place, God avails Himself of the rights which we have given Him in ourselves, and which really belong to Him. He pushes them so far, that we are astonished at their extent, and almost, so to speak, feel tempted to interrupt His progress.

But it is too late; God does not permit the soul thus unworthily to repent, when it has for years been making many advances. We have submitted to His dominion; He exercises it by degrees as much as pleases Him. We have given Him our liberty, and without restraining it, which would be contrary to the nature of the Liberal Arbitrator. He leads it by His grace, to will all that He wills, even the things that are most hard and agonizing.

He holds its consent; and He will not let it withdraw it, however much it may endeavour to do so.

This is the tyranny of love, of which we have previously spoken: tyranny of which

experience alone can tell the violence and the hardness, and which nevertheless we should be grieved not to experience ; our hearts ever saying amid all the rebellions of nature :

Seize, destroy, burn, content thyself, love, and do not spare me.

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## SECOND MEDITATION.

### *Entire Submission to God.*

*First Point.*—If our souls are given to God, we can no longer in any way dispose of ourselves. It is for God to rule all, to govern all, both externally and internally.

We must wish to form no project, to undertake nothing, whatever it may be, to change nothing in our lives, without consulting God, and without assuring ourselves as much as is possible of His will. We must know that one false step, of little consequence in itself, may disturb the order of those designs of God, upon which everything holds and depends. A change of residence, a journey, a visitor received or refused admission, an acquaintance formed or dissolved against the will of

GOD, no more is required to make our souls go forth from the scheme of God's Providence, with the most miserable result as to our growth in perfection—sometimes even to our salvation.

We can trace in the lives of many of the saints that their perfect conversion and their sanctification arose from certain external circumstances ordered by Providence, which appeared trifling in themselves. How much more, therefore, must the inner life of our souls depend upon grace ; how much more must we leave it to Him to deal with us, as He judges best.

It is not for us to sanctify ourselves, we understand nothing about it ; it is God Who sanctifies us ; we have but to second Him, and not to trouble His operations. For this reason let us carefully distinguish between what depends solely upon God, and what depends upon ourselves.

What depends solely upon God are our prayers, our consolations, our spiritual dryness, the various tests which are sent us.

In all this we must let God act for us ; we must be content with the state in which He places us ; not desire it to end if it be painful, nor to continue if it be sweet.

That which depends upon ourselves is mortification—above all, inward mortifica-

tion—the practice of virtues as they come in our way, watchfulness not to be drawn from our holy meditation, to preserve our peace, to withstand all that might disturb it.

To be faithful to all this we have efforts to make, fights to endure.

*Second Point.*—As God has given us His Priests for the guidance of our souls, as for this He has bestowed upon them His grace and His light, and that it is His will that we should be led by them, without seeking to meddle with ourselves; so soon as we have given ourselves to Him with the view to walk in the way of holy love, we must ask of Him to point out to us a man after His own heart; a man who unites skill and zeal, a man himself guided by the Spirit of God, and fit to rule others in the same spirit.

These directors are, unhappily, rarely to be met with in the Church of God, but they do exist; and we must pray that we may meet with such an one.

Let us be careful not to trust in ourselves to make so important and delicate a choice. We are not capable of it; we should be exposed to deceiving ourselves, and we should deserve to be deceived.

From all eternity God has made this choice for us; and if we will trust in

His Providence, we shall fall into the hands of the man to whom he has destined us ; a secret instinct will tell us that it is him, and the effects that come to us will soon convince us of it.

*Third Point.*—If we listen to God, He will Himself dictate to us the course which we ought to pursue with regard to the director of our souls.

The details of this point would be too long for the subject of one Meditation. But the principal point is to look upon this man in the spirit of faith, as though he were JESUS CHRIST Himself ; and to be firmly persuaded that so long as we thus look upon him, and for this reason thus conduct ourselves towards him, none of those numberless annoyances which come both from man and from the devil, and which seek to thwart the work of God, will accrue to us on the subject of direction.

Then the three things which spiritual devotion demands of us are : the opening of the heart, confidence, and obedience. Nothing must be hidden from our guide which may help him to know us well, and to help us more surely.

If he cannot trust us on this point, cannot rely on our candour and our sincerity, he is dissatisfied, he doubts, he does not

know how to act, or how to advise us as he ought.

Our own peace demands of us that we should have perfect confidence in him; that we should not allow ourselves to question his decision, nor to think differently.

He may be deceived, but we must not presume that he is deceived; and if it should be the case, either it will be in nothing of any consequence, or his error will be of short duration, or God will not allow it to hurt us.

With regard to obedience, it is so evident that it is quite indispensable, in all cases where there is no open sin involved, that it would be a waste of time to try to prove it.

The Holy Spirit working within, and obedience guiding without, we must surely advance in the way of Love.

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### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *Three Great Rules to Follow.*

*First Point.*—In the practice of Divine Love there are three great rules to follow, which will form the subject of this Medita-

tion. The first is, not to judge of the means which God employs with regard to us. As soon as we have given ourselves to Him we owe this respect to His infinite Majesty; not to ask Him the reasons of the way in which He treats us; we owe it to His infinite wisdom to be certain that He is not mistaken in the measures which He employs for His glory, and for our sanctification; and we owe it to His infinite goodness to believe that the severity which He exercises towards us is necessary, and has for its end our real good.

When we give ourselves to God, what is it that we give Him?

Ills to be cured; but ills which we know but imperfectly, of the cause of which we are ignorant; ills which we cherish, at least in their germ, and from which we fear to be delivered.

Should not such sick souls resort for their cure to a Physician Whose skill, Whose wisdom, and Whose goodness are unlimited?

Ought they to be astonished that He should discover in them maladies which escaped their knowledge, of which He fathoms the depth, to which He applies the iron and the fire, which He undertakes to exterminate to the roots. And can He succeed in this without making us suffer?

Let us bear the pain of the operation; let us keep our eyes closed to the means which He employs, and look to the result, to judge of His conduct.

The way of love is a way of faith, consequently obscure and dark; and herein consists its merit.

We walk in it blindly, not knowing where we are, and whither God is leading us. Reason understands nothing of it; and we must sacrifice it from the beginning to the end. It is but at the end of the way that we shall see the reason of the various paths along which God has made us tread.

When God ordered Abraham to sacrifice his son to Him—that child of promise, from whom would one day proceed the Messiah—if Abraham had reasoned upon an order apparently so opposed to the law of nature; if he had sought to compare this command with the predictions which had been made to him; if he had consulted his paternal tenderness; if he had asked God what his child had done to deserve such cruel treatment, and what he himself had done to be made to execute the sentence; his great sacrifice, that sacrifice so glorious to God, so pleasant in His eyes, which He rewarded even in the same hour with the renewal of His oath, and with the assurance of His pro-

- tection, and of His special blessings, would never have taken place. Abraham would have rendered himself unworthy of the glorious title of Father of the Faithful; he would have left the way of faith, in which he had always walked, he would have fallen short of perfection; and we know not what dire consequences might have arisen from disobedience caused by vain and false, but most seductive reasonings.

*Second Point.*—The same reasons which forbid us to judge of the means God employs towards us, do not allow us to judge ourselves, nor to seek to reflect upon our own state, in order to know whether we are making progress, and whether God is satisfied with us. In all these reflections, and all these anxious thoughts of ourselves, there is always much self-love; and, moreover, we run an evident risk of deceiving ourselves, either by being flattered by presumption, or being led by cowardice to judge ourselves unfavourably. Let us satisfy ourselves with two testimonies which we cannot doubt: that of God when we feel we are at peace with Him, and that of our director.

God never fails to re-assure the soul, as much as need be, in order to strengthen it and lead it on.

When He does not Himself send us this assurance, it is that He does not see that it is necessary, and that He wishes us to refer to him who holds His place.

Sometimes in simplicity we ask God to give us His gracious assurance. He it is Who inspires us to do so, and He does not refuse it to us.

But most of the time we are urged to it by an unquiet curiosity, by a want of self-forgetfulness, by the repugnance we feel in losing ourselves.

It is this reason also that makes us incessantly question a director as to our state, and that we oblige him to repeat the same thing a hundred times over. It is not at first that we need these assurances, or that we think of asking for them ; the sweet peace that we then feel, and which hardly ever leaves us, gives us no room to doubt that all is well between us and God.

But when this peace leaves us for a long time, when dryness, and temptations, and inward desolation succeed to it, we begin to think that we are not in the right way ; we examine ourselves anxiously ; we seek to see clearly into our state ; that is to say, we are fearful of entering into the strait and narrow way of faith and of pure love. O how dangerous it is thus to wish to judge ourselves ; specially as in such moments of

trouble, we are more disposed to listen to imagination, self-love, and the devil, than to our own director, and to God Himself.

Take it as an inviolable rule, never, under any circumstances, to judge yourselves.

This rule will be your peace and your safeguard: it is infallible in itself, and God always blesses it.

*Third Point.*—The third rule is never to be alarmed at any danger, any temptation, at any apparent neglect of God for us.

I know that this rule is more easy to dictate than to follow.

Nevertheless, we must submit to it generously, believing that, with the help of God, good will is invincible.

What does not the devil do, in conjunction with self-love, to draw us out of the way?

He shows us nothing but precipices, sins, and sacrileges; he tries to take from us the help of our spiritual guide, in prejudicing us against him, and in making us believe that he is directing us to our destruction.

What is to become of a soul which, beset by fearful temptations, imagines that it has fallen into them?

I have already said that we must not

seek our own judgment, but hold to that of our director.

This is not enough. We must overcome this imagination, despise it, resolve to cast it off with even more strength than the temptation itself, which is less dangerous to our soul.

Whatever our director may say, we are not yet thoroughly reassured, and he orders us to go to Holy Communion.

Then we tremble with fear at the idea of committing an act of sacrilege.

We must, however, have courage enough to obey in spite of this fear, which increases gradually until the moment of our Communion.

It is true that so soon as we have received JESUS CHRIST into ourselves, it vanishes, and leaves us calm and tranquil with Him ; but what does it not cost us, above all, at first to make the effort ! If we yield to the fear, the devil possesses himself of our will, and we shall yield to him always, unless we conquer him at once. And what are we to do when the tempter puts it into our hearts that our director is counselling us to our loss ?

Let us redouble our confidence in him ; let us, if necessary, make this great resolution : " Well, let him lose me, provided I obey."

This view of the case appears an extreme one. There is no other means of triumphing over the devil ; and it is to this extremity that God would lead a generous soul that has given itself up to love.

Then will the saying of JESUS CHRIST be fulfilled : " He that loseth his life for My sake the same shall find it."

If, on the contrary, we tried to save ourselves by listening to a heated and troubled imagination ; by neglecting Communion ; by changing our director ; we should lose the way of love, we should renounce perfection on the pretext of making sure of our salvation, and perhaps we should risk losing it entirely.

God only reduces to these extremities those souls for which He has some great designs. But since He forces me to abandon myself entirely to Him by love, I ought to foresee nothing, expect nothing, and be ready for all.

Oh, my God, I consent at once, if it be Thy good pleasure, to lose earth ; to know neither what I am, nor what I shall become, provided that by this sacrifice I attain to the purity of Thy love.

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## CONSIDERATION.

*On Inward Mortification.*

Inward mortification is nothing else but the practice of that continual renunciation which JESUS CHRIST requires of His disciples ; and as love alone can make us embrace it, so it is the most efficacious of all means of advancing in holy love.

All within us opposes the love of God. We must therefore battle with ourselves, and renounce ourselves in everything. This war which we undertake against ourselves is long ; it ends but with our life. It is painful ; we must always watch ourselves, always combat with ourselves, and allow ourselves neither peace nor truce to nature. It is agonizing ; we do not subdue ourselves without extreme suffering ; it is impossible for us to foresee or to calculate how much we shall suffer. But there is no medium course ; we must renounce ourselves entirely ; for if we once place any bounds to our renunciation, it is to place them in the way of the great commandment of love.

And if inward mortification is hard and frightening in itself, it is very sweet and consoling in its effects.

What more sweet than to see in ourselves

the growth of love in proportion as we destroy ourselves !

What more consoling than to be able to say : "The love of God found in me this hindrance, I have removed it, it no longer exists ! "

Pagan philosophy set, before itself, nothing more grand, nothing more noble, nothing more beautiful in its age, than to overcome passion, to render man master of himself. Reason itself teaches us the advantage it is to be able to control ourselves.

Christian philosophy carries it much higher ; and as it requires of us much harder victories, it allows us to gather from it much more delicious fruits. No, there is no happiness on earth to be compared to that of the Christian who, after long combats, is enabled to assure to Divine Love a peaceful reign in his heart, in submitting to all its enemies, which are his passions, his temper, his self-love, his self-will. This Christian is no longer hindered in the way of doing right ; he even finds therein an attraction, a marvellous facility ; he has no trouble of keeping from evil, of which the horror has become natural to him ; he is perfectly free, because he depends only upon grace, to which he no longer offers any resistance.

He is indifferent and dead to all else ; he

lives but in God ; he is only anxious for the interests of God.

What ought we not to be prepared to do and to suffer, in order to attain to this happy state.

And understand that this happiness begins directly we give ourselves up to inward mortification ; it increases in proportion to the progress we make therein ; it is at its height when we have carried it, where but little more is needed, to perfection.

Thus we have not to wait to receive the reward of our labours, and joy follows immediately upon our work.

Let us add that the love which commands mortification carries with it the power of softening it ; if it does not at first take away all its severity, it imperceptibly diminishes it, it makes us love that which we once abhorred.

This love has its moments of consolation, which are so sweet that we congratulate ourselves, as it were, upon having acquired a right in mortifying ourselves ; and when the season of sweetness is past, the strength of love is such that it easily triumphs over all that is most contrary to nature.

Again, God only makes us enter the lists gradually with the enemies against whom we have to fight.

He does not show them to us all at once. He just places those before us who are the

easiest to conquer ; and He reserves the more powerful ones until we are more inured to the warfare.

He gives us increased help as the combat becomes more difficult ; so that the later victories cost no less than the former ones.

But it is not we who fight, it is grace that fights for us.

God places Himself at our head, and vanquishes our enemies before us.

He asks of us but a determined will ; asks us to be armed with the sword of the Spirit, and to be covered with the shield of faith. O God, it is true that mortification only frightens those cowards who are so because they lean upon themselves, and because they lack confidence in Thee.

I have been one until now, but I would be one no longer.

I have resolved to subdue in myself all that is opposed to Thy love.

Thou knowest the measure of love that Thou expectest from me ; I can but give it by an equal measure of sacrifice. My mind is made up, but I can do nothing without Thee. Help and strengthen my weakness ; I am beginning very late ; make up to me for all these lost years ; Thou canst do it, Thou wilt do it ; it will be my fault if Thou hast to reproach me for not having loved Thee in time, and for not having loved

Thee in eternity as much as Thou desirest, and as I ought to love Thee.

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### ON CROSSES.

Crosses are the great means which God employs to destroy self-love in us and to increase and purify His love within us. Whilst we, on our side, labour for these two ends by the means which He has placed at our disposal.

The crosses finish the work ; without them it would be imperfect.

The reason of this is clear.

Self cannot kill itself ; the blow must be struck from elsewhere, and self must rest passive in receiving it.

As long as I act I live ; I shall mortify myself in vain, I shall not succeed in dying spiritually by my own efforts.

God must do this for me. He must act within me, and the fire of His love must consume the victim.

There are so many different kinds of crosses that it is impossible to enumerate them all ; and the same crosses are capable of infinite variety.

They change according to different characters, different circumstances, different degrees. Some are simply painful, some

are humiliating, others unite humiliation to pain.

Some assail a man in his worldly possessions, in those who are dear to him, in his health, in his honour, even in his life.

Others assail him in his spiritual interests, in that which touches his conscience, in that which concerns his eternal salvation; and these are undoubtedly the most frequent, the most destructive, and the most difficult to bear.

There are some which come from men, others from the devil, others which proceed from God.

All have an effect upon us which inward mortification is unable to produce, and without them we cannot expect to attain to an eminent degree of holiness.

Crosses have in them two great advantages with reference to the destruction of self-love.

The first is that they are not of our own choosing.

Self-love always has some part in those which we impose upon ourselves: witness austerities. Our own will, which makes us embrace them, supports us under them, and we find in them subtle pleasure, which causes us to make a merit of them before God.

"It is I," we seem to say, "who give Thee that; I deprive myself of such and

such a thing ; I suffer such and such a thing of my own free will, for love of Thee. I am not obliged to do it, it is pure generosity on my part, which cannot fail to be pleasing to Thee."

It is not thus with the crosses that God sends us.

They fall upon us when we least expect them. Far from choosing them, our first instinct is to repel them ; it is but with difficulty that our will determines to submit to them, not being able to avoid them.

Therefore the soul is not tempted to look upon as meritorious in the sight of God, a submission, which is in one sense but the effect of necessity.

On the contrary, it is generally humiliated by its want of courage, by the impatience, the complaints, the murmurings which escape it, and of which it is ashamed after the many fine protestations which it made to God.

Furthermore, as these crosses are not our own choice, we find in ourselves no strength to bear them ; we are obliged to bow humbly before God, to expect of Him alone our support, and to thank Him for His mercy, when we have not succumbed to them.

Self-love cannot, therefore, glorify itself upon this head.

The second advantage of crosses is that

God, whether He sends them directly from Himself, or allows them to be dealt us, always attacks some tender point, and presses in the nail before it is necessary to deal the death-blow to this particular haunt of self-love. He continues or redoubles this crucifying operation until it attains its end.

Consequently, if we let Him do this, and that our will does not give way whilst He is at work, His success is certain.

We see that God knows and understands our weak point; that He knows it, and we do not know it. We should generally prefer any other cross to that one which we actually have to bear. It wounds us and revolts against our nature. We cry aloud in our despair, or excess of agony renders us silent.

It was, therefore, necessary to strike the blow there; for there nature was alive, self-love was sorrowful because of it; and if it could have been master of the occasion, it would have struck the blow anywhere else, where the suffering would have been less deep. This is the reason why God sends us ordinary crosses.

With regard to those which are more rare, which go out of the common order of things, and which evince some great design on the part of God; all we can say of them here is, that God employs these crosses,

which consist principally in terrible temptations against purity, faith, hope, and charity, in order Himself to make war against self-love; that He pursues it with implacable fury wherever it may take refuge; that He will not allow it to have any footing anywhere; and that He banishes it altogether from a heart which He wishes to be wholly His.

Since crosses are the great scourges by which self-love is destroyed, and the best means of establishing in the soul the reign of Divine Love, my duty is to value them, to cherish them, to desire them, if God inspires me to do so; to await them at least with quietness, to receive them with submission, to bear them with patience and self-abandonment, and to make it my happiness here below to glorify God by this great feature of resemblance to JESUS CHRIST.

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